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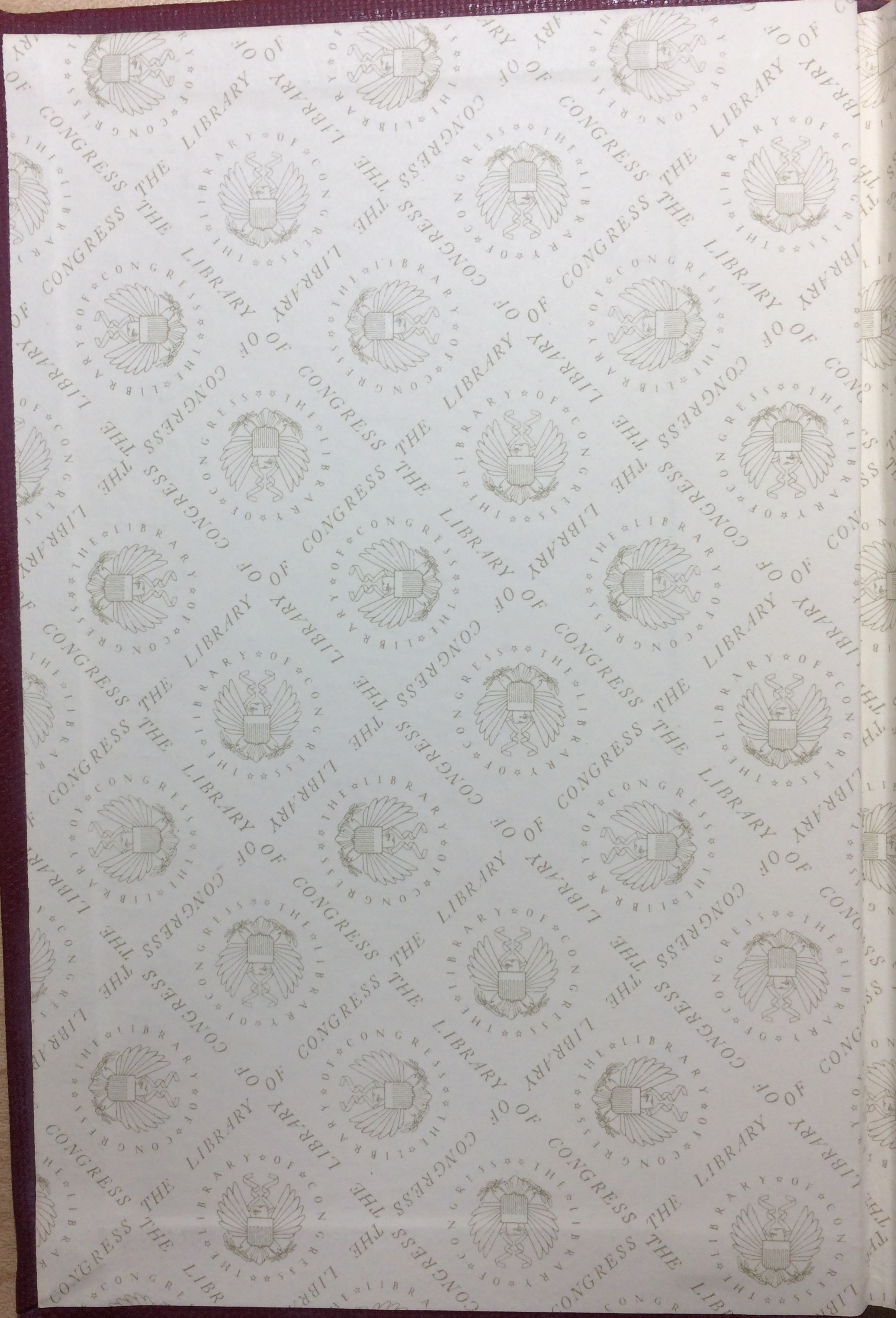
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The Impulse to  
Dominat

by  
D. W. Harding

LONDON  
George Allen &



# The Impulse to Dominate

*Henry Clement  
yatt* by  
D. W. Harding

LONDON

George Allen & Unwin Ltd.

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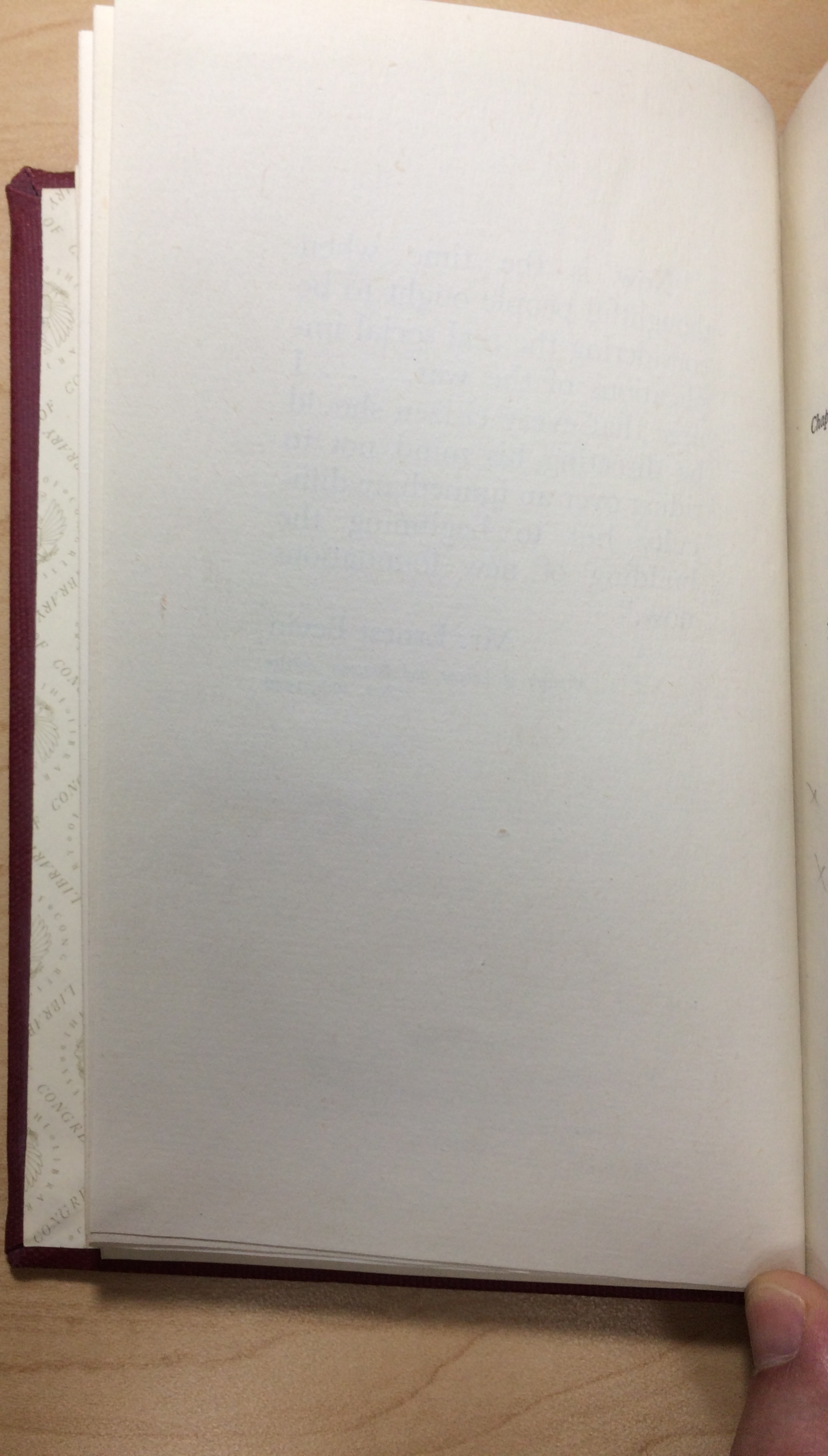


“Now is the time when thoughtful people ought to be considering the real social implications of the war. . . . I urge that every citizen should be directing his mind not to tiding over an immediate difficulty but to beginning the building of new foundations now.”

Mr. Ernest Bevin

*Minister of Labour and National Service*  
*Nov. 20th, 1940*







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## Preface

WRITING on war from a psychological standpoint is very different from attempting to write "the psychology" of war. Psychological discussions of the subject are at present too meagre and too conflicting for an authoritative treatment to be possible. This book is therefore a personal attempt to make the problem of war intelligible. And although I try to bring together as much of the relevant psychological thinking as possible, the views I put forward make no claim to be a consensus of psychological opinion.

The aid which psychology can give in the prosecution of war does not come within my purview. I omit it because, like most applied sciences, psychology in war-time is only harnessing its peace-time activities to a different purpose. Psychotherapy, industrial psychology, the psychology of group morale, vocational guidance and selection, the psychology of advertising and propaganda, all these find their uses in war-time. But they follow the same general principles in war as in peace. Certain of these general principles I do discuss, but only in so far as they are relevant to the purpose of understanding the psychological nature of war.

The book was completed in April 1940, but events connected with the war delayed its publication. In revising it at the present time I have referred once or



twice to recent developments, but without any systematic discussion of them. For in writing the book I was trying to get at essentials and provide only a framework within which detailed events could be brought into place by the reader.

Books cited in the text are referred to simply by the author's name. The reader will find the title of the book listed under the author's name, in the References, p. 249. When more than one book by the same author is included in the list the reference in the text indicates the particular book by giving the date of publication after the author's name; e.g. "Lasswell [1935]" refers to H. D. Lasswell, *World Politics and Personal Insecurity*, London, 1935.

Part of the material in Chapters III and IV appeared originally in *Scrutiny* and *The Sociological Review*, and more recently a shortened version of several chapters was published in *Scrutiny*. I am grateful to the editors of these journals for permission to reprint. For permission to quote at considerable length from *Falsehood in War-time* I am obliged to Lord Ponsonby and Messrs. Allen & Unwin; and to Mr. Siegfried Sassoon and Messrs. Faber & Faber for permission to make long quotations from *The Complete Memoirs of George Sherston*.

I am greatly indebted for criticism and suggestions to Dr. May Smith who read the book in manuscript. But to acknowledge her great help is not to commit her to agreement with my opinions. Those are my own responsibility.

D. W. H.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL LABORATORY  
UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL  
January 1941



## CHAPTER I

# Domination

WARFARE is one of several forms of violence in social life. Its distinguishing feature, according to an American psychologist, is that the violence is directed against people outside the community, is justified in the name of the community, and is accepted by the community (Lasswell [1935]). But the use of violence against other people is not a simple matter psychologically. From the merely logical standpoint one might suppose that human enemies could be treated like any other obstacle and wiped out as simply as possible. In fact, we are unable to do that without compunction. Other people have a social meaning for us; they are not just objects in the material world.

The result is that a surprising feature of much social violence, including war, is its moderation. If two men quarrel and come to blows, the fight ends long before either man is annihilated. The winner is satisfied with a much more moderate degree of victory. He stops as soon as his opponent, rather than suffer any more, agrees to a social relationship which the victor considers satisfactory: submission, apology, recognition of the victor's rights, or what not. In other words, what may



look like a determined effort to annihilate one another is really an attempt on each side to establish a tolerable social relationship with the other.

This queer inconsistency in social violence is given its clearest recognition in the institution of the duel. The European duel was only one form of an extremely widespread custom of settling disputes by means of regulated combat. The device gives institutional recognition to the fact that, even if social violence should at times result in killing, its underlying intention is to redress the social balance. It not only recognizes the fact, it also reinforces it and reminds the combatants to regulate their violence. How effective it may be, in spite of its seeming illogicality, can be judged from accounts of its operation among primitive peoples. Daisy Bates gives a good example which she observed at a Trappist mission station among the Australian aborigines. A young woman had married a man whom an older woman claimed as her husband. They put matters right by a fight with yam-sticks:

"The women fought steadily, blow for blow alternately, each blow well-timed and aimed for the direct centre of the skull. At length the younger woman fell unconscious, and the fight was over.

"When these purely personal quarrels took place, the Trappists found it best to let them run their course, so that there would be no subsequent ill-feeling. In this case the old woman lovingly attended the other, and stayed with her peacefully in the camp until she returned home, minus the husband, but quite satisfied."

In the same way, a *social* intention underlies wars as we know them. We might—many people do—suppose



that each nation's aim must be to exterminate its enemy as quickly and economically as possible. Nothing of the sort: certain effective means are strictly prohibited, rules and restrictions hamper the belligerents on all sides, and each devotes a great deal of propaganda to persuading the world that he is doing all he can to conduct the war "humanely," satanic though his enemy is. There is, in fact, an implicit understanding that in spite of the boundless destructiveness envisaged in war preparations the combatants are co-operating in a social institution for the settlement of their disputes. They are not trying to exterminate one another in the way they would exterminate locusts: they are trying by coercion to secure their rights within a social framework. The notion of "humane warfare," and the older notion of chivalrous warfare, ought by superficial logic to be irresistibly comic. In fact we take them solemnly, for they reflect firmly established ways of regarding violence in social life. The aggressive impulse is sanctioned, but it must not be taken to its logical conclusion in wholesale extermination; it must not lead us to behave towards human beings as if they were just dangerous animals. In so far as extermination does occur, it is deplored by the victors as a needless waste brought about entirely by the perverse rulers of the vanquished State.

There is in fact extraordinarily little cool extermination of other people. Very few deliberated, unregretted murders occur in civil life. In war-time exasperated adolescent minds (of all chronological ages) sometimes think that they would like the national enemy of the



moment to be exterminated. But their attitude is generally muddled. For underlying what they say there is also nearly always the illogical intention of *punishing* the victim; they fail to see that they cannot redress the social balance by obliterating the possibility of further contact with the wrong-doer. But most people implicitly admit that the violence is an unfortunate breach of community, necessary perhaps, but intended to allow of more satisfactory relationships being established in the future.

For us, living in a warring civilization, it needs an effort of detachment to view war in this light. Especially after a war has begun there seems something unreal in regarding it as a social institution sanctioned alike by the aggressor nations and ourselves. It presents itself to us as a struggle for survival, no more of our choosing than a struggle against flood or avalanche. And certainly the immediate responsibility for a particular war is not shared equally by both sides; our moral judgment is bound to take account of the ideals directing each and the provocations which lead to the outbreak. Yet, even while we blame one side more than the other for any given war, we can see that both sides regretfully accept war as one of the civilized methods of handling a dispute. Despite what we often say, war is not a collapse of civilization, not of *our* civilization. It is a regrettably drastic, but entirely legitimate, international expedient. The machinery for war stands ready, is in fact being improved, through all the intervals of peace—not merely military machinery, but a machinery of international law designed to regulate



warfare much as the Queensberry Rules regulate boxing. To a distant age or another planet our civilization must appear as one that reluctantly accepted "the terrible arbitrament of war" as part of its social machinery. We accept it because we see no other way in the last resort of correcting an intolerable social relationship, a relationship in which, for instance, we are dictated to politically, robbed of material wealth, humiliated, or threatened with cultural extinction. And the underlying intention of our wars is not to obliterate the enemy, men, women, and children, but to bring them to their senses and compel them to adopt a more satisfactory social attitude towards us.

Here, however, we must pause. It is no use contrasting war with "more satisfactory social relationships" unless we can say what those are. What have we in mind as the ideal against which war is condemned? Is it enough, for instance, for the hostilities between nations to become non-violent and to be carried on with tariff barriers, boycotts, cornering of raw materials, and attacks on each other's currency? No doubt this is better than physical warfare. And yet forcing a rival State to capitulate in face of poverty, and keeping smaller States in economic (and therefore political) bondage, is surely a rather shallow conception of peace.

Perhaps we have in mind an international order in which there would be no coercion, either military or economic, of one nation by another. But how can we hope for such a state of affairs internationally, when coercion is still the rule between individuals within the nation, where conditions have for long been much more



favourable? True, there is comparatively little violent coercion in civil life. But economic power, however indirectly exercised, is just as effective. A very large part of political life, working life, and of course family life, is organized by power, by putting one person in a position where others must do as he tells them—while he in turn has to do what somebody else tells him. If we take as our ideal of "peace" a texture of social life in which coercion and domination play no part, or only a small part, we shall be very remote from the practical politics of the moment. Yet we need some such conception. For without it we have as it were no psychological baseline from which to survey the various forms of conflict and antagonism, whether war or the many varieties that fall short of it.

The question is whether such non-dominative social organization is even conceivable. Many psychologists, however they phrased their views, would agree with McDougall in assuming that all social intercourse is cast in the mould of self-assertion and self-submission. American psychology, as its custom is, has sought a means of measuring the degree of a person's "ascendancy" and "submissiveness" (in Allport's "A-S" Scale). And, with a few exceptions, the consensus of psychological opinion has been that domination and submission provide the normal pattern of social intercourse, each offering its own satisfactions. In this the psychological view has been at one with everyday opinion. And, we must note, it is a view which implies that warfare is only an unusually violent form of an inescapable social pattern.



But the nature of self-assertion and self-submission needs to be looked at more closely. They are relationships which occur only when differences arise—differences of opinion, intention, judgment, taste, and so on. The people concerned may, of course, simply "agree to differ"; they insulate themselves from each other over that particular point. But if they wish to maintain close social contact (as they must, for instance, if they are to co-operate in a piece of work), they must reach agreement. Each, perhaps, must give way a little. The self-assertive or dominative person is one who expects that in such a case he will give way less than the other.

Incidentally we must notice that self-assertion is not achieved solely by force. Affectionate relationships permit it equally. The unspoken threat of withdrawing affection, besides various other forms of emotional bullying, is quite as effective as forcible domination. But whether force or affection is used the result is the same, in that agreement is reached either because one person submits totally or because both make partial submission.

One-sided and extreme forms of this relationship are found in the submission of slave to master, where force is the ultimate sanction, and of child to parent, where affection plays a large part. Such social relationships as these certainly offer many satisfactions. But in most people's view they are not the finest development of social life. Companionship with equals gives greater satisfactions. Agreement given by an equal is more gratifying than the submission of child, servant, or subordinate. It is more gratifying because he was perfectly free to oppose you. The agreement of an equal



takes the form: "Why, yes, of course; I see now that you're right"; the submissive associate is too prone to say in effect: "Well, I don't quite see it, but no doubt you're right."

Now to leave his associate genuinely free to disagree with him without discomfort is not characteristic of the self-assertive person. Disagreement with him is apt to cause some cooling or some rift in the social relationship. Even if he permits the disagreement it is not genuinely welcome. To welcome disagreement means exposing one's self to change, and to many people that seems hazardous. They must hang on to their own individuality at all costs. As the Sutties [1933] have pointed out, "by death an adult means loss of individuality." It follows that differences of outlook in other people, which invite us to change ourselves, cannot be positively welcomed unless we feel secure—that is, unless we feel that there is so wide a margin of safety between ourselves and psychological disintegration that we can assimilate great changes of outlook without fear of losing our individuality.

But welcoming the opportunity which differences present does not mean mere submission either. The submissive partner is not developing the full possibilities of a social situation any more than the assertive one. He aims almost exclusively at agreement and harmony. By putting the emphasis there, instead of asking whether what they agree about is satisfactory in itself, he too emasculates the social situation and diminishes its possibilities. He makes harmony too easy to mean anything. He may be as docile as a weathercock, and still



his personality will not really change, for its permanent structure actually consists, to a great extent, in this dependent agreement with the forceful personality of the moment. On the other hand his docility may be sham and his submission only lip-service for the sake of peace and quiet. If so he is in effect withdrawing his individuality, inviolate and unchanged, from the social situation. He is merely a would-be dominative person frustrated. And this type of person also diminishes the social possibilities, depriving both himself and his associate of the opportunity given in equal companionship.

True equality in a social contact was implied in the idea of "primitive comradeship" put forward by F. C. Bartlett [1923]. He explicitly rejected McDougall's view that all social responsiveness fell into the pattern of domination and submissiveness. He had in mind, however, mainly team-work and other forms of co-operation where there is a difference of function between those who take part but where they already have a common aim. But non-dominative behaviour is conceivable even when differences of aim and outlook arise between two people. This possibility has been expounded by H. H. Anderson, an American psychologist who has made studies of the social behaviour of young children. Taking the view that domination and submission are only obverse and reverse of the same social relationship, he looks for an alternative, a genuinely different, relationship. This he finds in what he calls "social integration."

In this "integrative behaviour" the one partner



certainly has plans and views and an outlook of his own, and certainly hopes that his companion will agree with them and co-operate with him. Yet it is not his primary aim to secure agreement with them as they stand. Instead he regards his contact with a companion as an opportunity for testing their validity, trying them out in the setting of a different personality. This does not mean merely being ready to modify them under pressure. It means an over-riding concern to be impartial in making his suggestions and to avoid all pressure or forcefulness or undue persuasiveness which would make criticism more difficult. All he does is to offer his companion a new possibility of behaviour or belief and try to ensure that obstacles to the fair understanding of it are removed. At the same time he is exposing himself and his intentions to the reaction they produce in his companion. The conception is of a fully reciprocal social process by which two people are each modified and something new, unpredictable, and different from both of them emerges. It is a development of personality, "a process of change in structure or function that results from increasingly complex relations with persons different from one's self."

What Anderson means by integration is made clearer by the account he gives of domination and submission. The domitative person knows what he believes and what he wants, and he has no intention of changing because he meets someone who thinks differently. As Anderson puts it:

"He does not yield to differences; he is not abandoning his status; he is trying to preserve status. He



is not seeking a better understanding of another nor is he trying to achieve a redefining of desires, values, or objectives in order to discover a lower common denominator of differences. . . . Domination seeks not self-abandoning, but self-preservation. It resists change."

As for submission, Anderson goes on:

"Domination tends to induce resistance. But resistance is itself dominative behaviour. If the relative strength is too great, domination will produce submission.

"Resistance and submission are both fear responses; they show fear of losing *status quo*. Submission is not to be confused with yielding. Submission is a coerced response of fear; it is not spontaneous. Yielding is a spontaneous response by an individual so unconcerned with his own security that he is not afraid to change or give up his present status."

For the present purpose the importance of "social integration" is that it stands for a mode of handling divergences of aim and opinion which is *totally* different from war, and not just a more restrained form of the same dominative behaviour. It is true that this is very remote from practical politics. But if we want to find an uncompromising meaning for "peace"—and without this a discussion of war is apt to be inconclusive—the idea of social integration holds out one possibility.

"Integration!" exclaims the sceptical reader. "More jargon and mystery-mongering! What is there here except the perfectly familiar facts of co-operation and compromise?" Admittedly, integrative behaviour has always been practised; it was not originated in the



nursery schools of Iowa where Anderson studied it. But, on the other hand, co-operation and compromise as we usually meet them are something very different from what Anderson describes. The "co-operativeness" that we pay lip-service to may perhaps be the same as integration. The co-operation we meet in practice is totally different. In most cases it means that two or more people find that they have some aim in common, so that each can achieve his object more effectively if they work as a team. At other times it means that by helping someone to achieve *his* object we indirectly achieve our own as well; most forms of employment and buying and selling involve this sort of co-operation. But in all these instances we are dealing with mutual help in achieving aims which each partner has already formulated for himself and is not invited to change. Integration, on the other hand, is a mode of handling *differences* of aim. Again, we sometimes call a person "co-operative" when we mean "submissive" or docile in helping us with our own plans. And finally there are occasions when "co-operation" means that we submit to help our associate in *his* aims on the understanding that we can claim his submissive help in *our* aims later on. Now in all these cases integrative behaviour may at times occur. But it need not. Such co-operation or social bargaining may—and commonly does—take place without it.

What of compromise? Here certainly differences of opinion or aim—the essential preliminary to integration—do occur. But the compromises that we generally meet with still fall short of integration. They occur when the



effort at domination has been so powerful on both sides that each has had to concede a point and make partial submission in order to secure what he wants in other directions. No new principle is introduced by compromise; the domination is no longer on one side only, but domination and submission still provide the mould in which the relationship is cast. What results is a mixture of the original opposing aims, not a true compound. And, of course, in most compromises neither side is satisfied. Each would still prefer his original intention. In social integration, by contrast, each partner has spontaneously accepted the newly emergent aim as more satisfying than what he originally intended. Thus there seems ample reason to use some special term for this type of social interaction. The term "reciprocity," used for instance by Piaget in his studies of children's social development, refers largely to compromise and co-operation, mere social bargaining. "Integration" seems as good a word as any, conveying as it does the idea of different structures or functions interacting to form a genuine whole.<sup>1</sup>

It is integrative behaviour which gives the greatest social significance to other people, and to practise it extensively means that social responsiveness is highly developed in comparison with other interests and desires. Other people are taken seriously. The greatest possible significance is given both to their sanctioning

<sup>1</sup> One of the central themes of E. Graham Howe's *War Dance*, if I understand it, is the contrast between integrative and dominative behaviour. Those for whom my account of the matter is too arid may find that the idea can be assimilated more readily in the idiom of *War Dance*.



and to their challenging of one's own personality. Domination, in contrast, always involves a belittling of other people's social significance; they become helpers, or dependents, or employees, instead of companions. At the extreme they may be treated only as if they were tools or obstacles, objects in the outer world that happen to be animate and so have more varied powers than rocks and stones and trees. War, of course, is bound to belittle the social significance of people in this way.

It is from this point of view that war appears only as an extreme form of a mode of social behaviour that is widely accepted as inevitable. Many have pointed out that there is no complete change of outlook when people go to war. One way of putting the fact is to say with Lasswell [1935] that the populations of the world live in the "expectation of violence" as the only way of bringing to an end—favourably or calamitously—their gathering insecurities. Violent coercion may be staved off for a long while, but it is awaited as the ultimate outcome of the crises of tension between conflicting national aims. No other conclusive way of handling the dispute can be conceived. In civil life domination is the recognized solution to disputes. Economic pressure, the leverage given by social status, and the persuasive manipulation of public opinion are the usual weapons. The individual makes his final appeal to physical force only through the central authority, the law and police. He need not use physical violence on his own responsibility. But there is no supra-national authority, and the nation must act on



its own responsibility. When a nation sets about dominating another by force, in order to settle a dispute, the citizen feels that it is only doing what he would finally have to do in civil life if there were no central authority.

He would do it with regret, just as he regrets the necessity for his nation to go to war. For he realizes, dimly or clearly, that he has social impulses which conflict with the intention of annihilating other human beings as if they were only inconvenient objects in the material world. They are part of his social world; even in the front-line trenches he may develop an inconvenient tendency to fraternize with them. The institutions regulating war give these social impulses a form that makes them more manageable and at the same time more systematic and predictable in their outcome. Prisoners are to be treated in specified ways, the wounded given consideration, civilians spared, certain types of weapons avoided, and so forth. These regulations are a way of recognizing that war is not a matter of simple attack on natural obstacles; we do not blast away a nation with the same cheerfulness as we do a fall of rock. War is a way of influencing people socially, of getting them to recognize our rights and to accept a social relationship with us of a sort that we consider satisfactory. It is the survivors of the defeated nation that we are really interested in. Killing their friends has not been a way of improving the material world, as killing malarial mosquitoes would be; it has been the only way we could find of putting right something in the social world.



The reason it seems to be the only way is that domineering behaviour in the face of disagreements is the only means that has received effective public recognition and been strongly institutionalized. Integrative behaviour does occur, and, if we could give it public institutional status, we should notice it more readily. We might then be surprised to find how frequent it already is. But look at the newspapers, or listen to scraps of conversation in the street, and observe how much more interested we are in dispute and conflict. Sticking up for your own opinion, standing firm for "what you know to be right," refusing to be turned aside—in fact, securing the maximum social influence for what you already are instead of trying to develop—these are the attitudes which we encourage and for which our legal institutions cater. And they are the attitudes which we eventually express in war.



## CHAPTER II

# Acquiescence in Wars

THE argument of the previous chapter implies that the ordinary citizen will not easily find logical reasons for resisting the idea of war. He acquiesces in the idea of domination and submission as a rule for private life, for he can see no other way of dealing with differences. He may strongly object to the violence of war and believe that domination and submission should be controlled and regularized by a legal system in international affairs, as they are in civil life; he may favour the idea of supra-national police in place of national armies. But confronted with dominative intentions on the other side (as the citizens on both sides feel sure they are) he can see nothing for it but dominative resistance. Since, without an international legal system, this means physical violence, he can see no course open to his Government but going to war. In this sense the ordinary citizen is responsible for war, for it only extends and intensifies a type of behaviour that he sanctions in every other part of his life.

But we need to be on our guard against assuming too simple a parallel between the individual's dominative behaviour in private life and his support of some par-



ticular national war. There is one tremendous difference between them—namely, the much smaller extent to which a citizen can understand national policy than he can his own private actions. The disparity between his insight and the actual complexity of the situation is vastly greater in national than in individual affairs. We *may* all make mistakes in private life; but in judging of national affairs we are certain to. This is what has to be remembered whenever we talk of an individual's being identified with his nation and treating it as an extension of his own personality, taking pride in its actual achievements, lamenting its setbacks, and consequently sharing responsibility for its policy. This emphasis on identification is in many ways illuminating. But it may be seriously misleading unless we immediately qualify it by observing how little the identification implies; how little knowledge, at all events, strong though the emotional bond may be. It would be quite wrong to speak as though our acquiescence in a national policy were on a par with our decision, say, to buy a new house, throw up our job, go to law. Even in these private matters the chances of making a bad mistake through ignorance or through failure to grasp the situation fully are very great; yet these private affairs are transparently simple compared with the intricate complication and confusion of national business. We have to accept guidance from the "experts" in politics as much as we do in medical matters or any other technical specialism.

There is nothing unique in this respect about our identification with a national group; the same difficulty



is familiar from early childhood. We are firmly attached to a family group not only by economic but also by strong sentimental ties long before we have sufficient information, intelligence, or experience to understand what our family is really trying to do and within what social framework its efforts are being carried on. We are given to understand that father's work is something extremely important and creditable, for some reason a matter of family pride, that our elder brother's bad school report is a family misfortune and that his athletic prowess does something to retrieve it, that Uncle James is mentioned with a hush and Uncle Alfred's riches with a different sort of hush; out of a tangle of this kind of observation, together with such explanations as he can understand, the child creates a hazy notion of family status and achievement, long before he has grasped the conditions of the social order and the place of his family within it. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that a very large proportion of the population of a modern nation have an understanding of national affairs which is fairly comparable to the ten-year-old's grasp of his family's affairs.

But, as everyone knows, dim understanding brings no moderation of zeal. The connection between our insight into the problems of our social group and the force of our conviction about them would repay study; it is certainly not a simple connection either positive or inverse. Ordinary observation suggests three possible phases: first, that of simple conviction, more or less emotional, centred round symbols of a group the nature and circumstances of which are very dimly and imper-



fectly grasped; then a phase in which a growing realization of the complexities brings greater detachment, perhaps with a disillusionment accompanied by protest or cynicism; and, thirdly, a phase of greater insight which does justice to the complexity of the facts without precluding conviction and fervour. The modern nation is too complicated a structure, and set in too complicated a system of forces, for many of its members to have reached the third phase (though many believe they have). Perhaps most people are still in the first phase, but a large number have reached the second and are finding it uncomfortable.

The contrast between a nation and a small social group—say, for instance, a village cricket club—is seen especially in two points. Firstly, the individual in the small group can see fairly clearly how its dealings with other groups will affect him personally. He has only dim conjecture or fervent belief to inform him how the larger political movements will affect him personally. Secondly, the member of a cricket club—if he has average intelligence—can fully understand the problems which his club faces, the nature of the conditions under which it exists, and the meaning of the decisions that it takes. To do the same in national politics he would need vastly more than average intelligence and information.

Obvious though they may be, the effects of great increases in the size and complications of a social group can hardly be over-stressed. Not only do its contacts with other groups become more extensive and intricate, but the relationships of sub-groups within it, each with



its special aims, become more and more difficult to keep track of. Our anger at the machinations of "vested interests" is often unreasonable: they are usually just such manoeuvres as we and our friends perform in private life, and we are really angered less by their selfishness than by their surreptitious nature and the unexpected complications they produce in what we had imagined to be fairly simple public affairs.

The larger and more complicated a social group becomes, the smaller the proportion of its members that can have any full grasp of the conditions of its policy and the significance of its corporate decisions. The ordinary members must take more and more on faith from the specialists who govern. Those non-specialists who insist on forming an individual opinion—not suggested by any of the political sub-groups who compete for office—are at a hopeless disadvantage, if only through simple lack of information. The course of events constantly reveals them as having been unintentionally over-simplifying the situation. When, for example, the Munich Agreement of 1938 gave parts of Czecho-Slovakia to Germany, many people who most strongly opposed acquiescence in the German aggression demanded that at least a large loan should be made to Czecho-Slovakia; almost before their demands were in print it became publicly apparent that if the loan had been made it would in effect have gone to Germany.

The full significance of a specific political demand can seldom be seen by the ordinary citizen. He is in the position of trying to pull little levers in a machine so huge and intricate that he cannot judge what effect his



lever would have if he did succeed in pulling it. The quandary is well described by Sassoon when he tells how he and a friend argued about the political machinations that were prolonging the war of 1914:

"Neither of us had the haziest idea of what the politicians were really up to (although it is possible that the politicians were only feeling their way and trusting in providence and the output of munitions to solve their problems). Nevertheless we argued as though the secret confabulations of Cabinet Ministers in various countries were as clear as daylight to us, and our assumption was that they were all wrong, while we who had been in the trenches were far-seeing and infallible."

These difficulties arise, not from particular political systems, but as an inevitable consequence of the growth of social groups to a size and complexity disparate with the intelligence, capacity for interest, and range of information of their individual members. Life is too short even for the politician to master the intricate detail of more than a few public problems; the more important his position in the governmental hierarchy the more he has to take other men's conclusions as his data. As for the ordinary citizen with other work to do, an opinion on national affairs must necessarily be based on an assortment of facts and arguments minute in proportion to the original facts and possible opinions from which it has been selected. And this would remain true however intelligent and impartial the Press might become. Loyalty to the corporate decisions of a group as large and complicated as a modern nation is bound to be very largely blind loyalty.



A public going to war will, as we know, include many shades of opinion. Some will positively want the war, exasperated by the wrongs they believe the enemy to have committed and aggressively welcoming a chance of "putting him in his place." Some will welcome the chance of adventure and the break with routine and other anticipated satisfactions which must be discussed later (see Chapters VI and VII). Others will be more reluctant, counting the cost, but still accepting the view that their nation's existence and freedom and right place in the society of nations make the war a hard necessity. There may be a very few in each nation who believe the enemy to be in the right. There will be a larger number, where the current institutions allow it, who will conscientiously object. And there will be a larger number still—but exactly how large there seems no way of discovering—who will do as they are told from little more than an unwillingness to rebel or a sense of impotence. Except for those who conscientiously object and those who work for the enemy, the whole of the public may be said at least to acquiesce; and this colourless term is the best way of indicating the upshot of their diverse attitudes without asserting anything about their degree of fervour.

Naturally the men who direct the war want as much fervour as they can get. But any sort of acquiescence will carry them a long way. This is due to the fact that the decision to go to war—even the serious contemplation of it—at once brings into action a mass of social machinery which has been kept in readiness, and at many points improved on, ever since the previous war.



A trifling illustration is perhaps more illuminating here than any reference to the larger and more obvious preparations for war:

"In 1915 the R.S.P.C.A. established a Fund for Sick and Wounded War Horses, and by the end of the war had spent £200,000 in supplying Royal Army Veterinary Corps with equipment and veterinary supplies. More money than this was subscribed, but when the end of the war came it could not be used for other charitable purposes as it had been given specifically for use in war. It was therefore retained by the Treasury Commissioners, who immediately released it on the outbreak of the present war." (*Manchester Guardian*, November 14, 1939.)

In such perfectly logical ways are such unwarlike intentions quietly given their own small place in the enormous machine.

Are we to talk, then, as if a modern public were trapped or seduced into war by an unmanageable machine for which it has no responsibility? During the quietest period between wars the general public is not interested in war preparations and may, sickened by the last bout, be hostile to them. But as international differences come into the foreground of the news again, and the idea of domination is brought back into prominence, it becomes fairly easy to secure agreement to an increase in armaments. Even in the most aggressive nations this implies no desire for war among the mass of the public. They agree to arm only in order to ensure peace or as a means to secure bargaining power in demanding bare justice for their nation. Yet their



acquiescence is crucial; they sanction the idea of domination as the only means of settling ultimate differences in international affairs; they look to the threat of force to maintain or increase the deference which their nation can command in international discussions.<sup>1</sup>

That the publics of the world have some measure of responsibility for their wars appears also from the fact that they will not consent to increase their armaments until they have emerged from their worst repugnance against the last war. In England, after the war of 1914, the turning-point for the general public came in 1931, when Lord Ullswater could say that too much money was being spent on elementary education, when the newspapers began to find that stories of spies, adventures, and humour from the last war would again go down very well, and when the use of "pacifist" as a term of derision once more became possible to columnists and cartoonists. Whether deliberate propaganda had any hand in providing this type of material no one can say; but its success showed that there was a public very willing to lap it up. This was evidently a differently-minded public from the one whose anticipated reluctance for a further war contributed to bring about Mr. Lloyd George's resignation in 1922.<sup>2</sup>

Politicians who interpret their public's sincere wish for peace as a mandate not to prepare for war may subsequently have to face reproaches:

<sup>1</sup> Deference is not to be confused with respect. The distinction is discussed in Chapter XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. an account of a conversation with Lloyd George in Lord Riddell's *Intimate Diary of the Peace Conference and After*, pp. 388-9.



"Norway is not expected to give direct aid to Finland. Her inability to do so is reflected in the leading article in the *Tidens Tegn*, the leading daily, which says:

" 'Our political history in the past decade is a record of lost opportunities. To-day one could weep when thinking of the lack of sense of duty which the Government showed in its indecision on whether we should arm.' " (*Observer*, December 12, 1939.)

In most States, however, unobtrusive support is given to the military leaders even in the most peaceful periods, and they never lack influential political backing. Sir John French, for example, received constant help and encouragement from Lord Esher during the period of public apathy towards military affairs which followed the South African War. The state of affairs at such periods is well suggested in a letter written to Lord Esher in 1904, which Gerald French quotes in his biography:

"I know in my heart that all of us at Aldershot do our utmost to prepare for war, but we meet with nothing but discouragement."

In this way the professional soldiers make their preparations conscientiously and quietly while the public as a whole gives no serious attention to the possibility of war.

The question of what responsibility "the general public" or "the man in the street" must take for the coming of war is raised in a particular form if we ask how far wars are fostered by the existence of a military sub-group within each nation, with its ramifying auxiliaries in the form of arms manufacturers and other



contractors. F. C. Bartlett [1923] suggests that, at least in primitive groups, the community segregates certain of its interests and emotions by committing them to the care of a specialized sub-group; and in this way it has not only its hands free for other activities, but its mind free too. The fears and the aggressiveness of the ordinary member of the group are to some extent canalized by the priests and the warriors. The special sub-groups, however, always tend to work for an extension of their power and prestige in the community. This professional striving, it seems to follow, must partially reverse the process that created the sub-group: it must once more widen the sphere of influence of those tendencies which were being segregated.

Applied to a group as complex as a modern nation this kind of argument may be too speculative. But we can agree that the professional sub-groups—military, legal, medical, ecclesiastical, for instance—are usually trying to increase their influence and prestige. And when the community has its mind full of their particular concerns—aggressive self-defence, disputes, fears for health, guilt—their prestige will reach its maximum.<sup>1</sup> Thus the professional pride of military men finds its greatest satisfaction, and their power reaches its maximum in time of war. The argument often put forward

<sup>1</sup> This is true when the sub-group's function is regarded as honourable. But if the tendency it canalizes is disapproved of, its wider spread amongst the community will not bring greater prestige to the specialists. Thus increasing sexual promiscuity will not increase the prestige of prostitutes; nor will increasing superstition bring prestige to the few remaining witches, but only to the more respectable astrologers.



by professional soldiers that they of all people are the last to want a war, bearing the brunt of it as they must, is not altogether convincing. It is clear that for the commissioned ranks, at all events, promotion, power, and prestige are gained more rapidly in war than in peace. To the professional soldier, war is bound to be opportunity. As Gerald French writes:

“... my father was on his way to the Cape, as fast as ship could carry him. How little he then knew that the campaign before him would firmly establish his position on the road to fame. . . .”

Sir John French's first success in that campaign was the battle of Elandslaagte. He referred to it in a letter to Sir Ian Hamilton on the eve of the war of 1914, and the tone of his letter further illustrates the inevitable difference of attitude towards war between the professional soldier and the ordinary citizen:

“That we should stand side by side again in war as we have stood before has always been one of the great desires of my life. . . . I never have and never shall forget that glorious and successful little battle we fought together at Elandslaagte.” (Earl of Ypres, *Some War Diaries and Correspondence*.)

In 1911 another military man, Sir Herbert Plumer, thought of leaving the Army and taking a post in civil life rather than accepting the relatively unimportant Northern Command. A letter from Lord Roberts, dissuading him from this course, shows again the meaning which war is bound to have for professional soldiers:



"The Northern Command is not a very exciting one to a practical soldier, but it is socially a pleasant one, and it keeps you on the active list for seven years longer; if you decided to accept the offer of the Command, you would then be not much past sixty-two, and in those seven years no one can foretell what may happen. There is trouble in the air, trouble which seems to me likely to increase rather than lessen, and if war should break out during that time you would bitterly regret having left the Army."<sup>1</sup>

None the less it would be absurd to make the professional soldier the scapegoat whenever we recoil from our institution of warfare. The military profession focuses a tendency rather than creates it, and in time of war the tendency becomes too widespread to be canalized. The relation of the army to the community in war-time was well put by Mr. Hore-Belisha in the House of Commons in 1940 on his resignation from the post of Secretary of State for War:

"This year there might be as many as 3,000,000 men under arms [Mr. Hore-Belisha continued], and he had always thought upon it as an ideal that the Army should be a part of the nation and not apart from the nation, and that it should be a career on which every young man could enter with the knowledge that he could rise by his character and ability, regardless of his status or means. He had hoped that in the same way we might thus gradually bind all the members of the nation more closely in mutual understanding."

To the indignant and embittered public of the next peace this will sound calamitously funny. Yet it quite

<sup>1</sup> Harington, *Lord Plumer of Messines*.



justly reflects the process in group psychology which Bartlett identified in discussing the nature of special sub-groups: in peace-time ostensibly apart from the nation, in war-time acclaimed as part of it.

The terms in which I have discussed the responsibility of individual members of the public for the institution of war imply two beliefs: firstly, that certain deep impulses and firmly rooted habits of mind do in effect sanction the institution and hinder the erection of psychological obstacles to its working; secondly, that the machinery of the institution none the less outruns individual intention and is in this sense an unfortunate cultural accident. These two beliefs represent a compromise—which it must be feared would satisfy neither side—between the extreme psycho-analytic view of man's innate destructiveness and the extreme view of human peacefulness offered in Perry's anthropological theory. A fuller discussion of this conflict of opinion is attempted in Chapters V and VI.



### CHAPTER III

## Securing Acquiescence

THE prosecution of a war without the support of "public opinion," in some sense of that term, is probably impossible to any modern nation, whatever its form of government. Many people would agree with this statement, but whether they would agree in the meaning they gave the term is another matter. The question of its meaning is important owing—among other reasons—to the widely held impression that public opinion is likely to have greater validity than any of the individual opinions that go to make it up. Siegfried Sassoon reports how, when he protested publicly against the prolongation of the war of 1914, his friendly but desperate Colonel argued: "And surely it stands to reason, Sherston, that you must be wrong when you set your own opinion against the practically unanimous feeling of the whole British Empire." And "... a celebrated novelist (for whose opinion I had asked) wrote: 'Your position cannot be argumentatively defended. What is the matter with you is spiritual pride. The overwhelming majority of your fellow-citizens are against you.' "



This belief in the greater validity of public opinion comes about because we think that it emerges from the contact and interaction of many different opinions. They represent many more outlooks and insights, they reflect more aspects of the problem, and they are backed by more varied types of experience than any individual opinion. In other words, public opinion is given the validity of a "collective judgment." And certainly a collective judgment, though it may quite well be wrong, always deserves respect and cannot be lightly dismissed. Because collective judgment has such prestige we ought not to give an opinion this status without special care. We ought not to imply that an opinion is a collective judgment unless it results from active co-operation on the part of the whole group, with the individual opinions mutually sanctioning or challenging each other. No one can lay down the precise degree of interaction that has to occur before we begin to speak of a collective judgment, but it is worth while insisting that an unusually high degree of "integrative" discussion and an unusually high measure of agreement should have occurred before the impressive title is bestowed.

A collective judgment in this sense is practically unattainable by a community as large as a nation and including so many incompatible points of view and sectional ambitions. True collective judgment is difficult to arrive at among two or three people. It may occasionally emerge from a small committee. Official commissions of a supposedly representative membership generally manage to produce a majority report; but in spite of the most cautious qualification of every-



thing it recommends some influential section of the community is certain to oppose it. In fact we can practically leave aside the idea of collective judgment when we discuss the public opinion of a nation—even of a very small nation.

What are we left with, then? For in some sense public opinion does exist and does very greatly matter. Two aspects of it seem to be of chief importance: the first can be called the range of permissible opinion among the public; the second its ruling opinion.

Whenever a controversy arises within a social group there will be a certain range of opinion that can be publicly affirmed without being regarded as abnormal, wilful, or so dangerous that it deserves to be crushed by force. Many opinions with which neither the majority of the public nor its most powerful members would agree are still treated as permissible, and in some of the Western democracies in peace-time the range of permissible opinion on most subjects has been fairly wide. It has limits, however—limits set by a background of customary belief, sanctioned sentiment and ideal, and established usage. At the abdication of Edward VIII, for instance, no newspaper or “responsible” man came out publicly with the view that the king ought to marry someone acceptable and content himself with a mistress in private life. Earlier periods provided ample precedents, but they were periods with a different background of sentiment and usage.

For an opinion to be permissible, at least part of the group, and an influential part, must feel that even if the opinion is wrong its advocates deserve to be met



with argument and persuasion; their view must not be excluded from the social context by being treated as abnormal or indecent or dangerous or otherwise so intolerable as to merit social isolation. Impermissible opinion is the extreme towards which a view passes as it loses prestige; the less prestige we accord it the more high-handedly we dismiss it, until an extreme may be reached at which our social obligation to its advocate almost disappears, and he becomes little more than an animate object of a dangerous or ridiculous kind.

This is only a schematic simplification of the facts, for in reality the dividing lines are never so sharp. In particular it is all too common for opinions to be forcibly suppressed, especially by economic pressure, in spite of being ostensibly accorded full social rights.

A permissible public opinion may have any degree of influence in a group, according to the number and power of its supporters, and in speaking of public opinion we frequently mean what may be termed the ruling or predominant opinion of the group. The term "predominant opinion" was introduced by G. C. Thompson in 1886 in a study of *Public Opinion and Lord Beaconsfield, 1875-1880*.<sup>1</sup> It provides a useful way of referring to those opinions that have secured the agreement, or at least the passive acquiescence, of the whole group or of an overwhelming majority. That is to say, they can be put forward as the opinions of a corporate body, since the opposition they meet with is not violent enough or influential enough to disrupt the social group. The opinion that increased armaments were

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Lasswell [1935].



necessary for Britain in 1936 could be called a ruling opinion. It was not unanimous, and the opposing opinion was certainly permissible. But, though permissible, the opposition was not strong enough to obstruct the armament programme. If there had been any members of the public decisively enough opposed to it to advocate sabotage, their opinion would have fallen outside the permissible range and they could have been put down forcibly without risk of disruption to the nation as a whole.

In time of peace there occurs, at least in democratic countries, an extremely important interaction or at least state of tension between the ruling opinion on any topic and the other permissible opinions. The advocates of the ruling opinion remain aware of their opponents' views and to some extent have to moderate their own accordingly. The terms in which capital punishment, fox-hunting, British rule in India, are now defended are much more moderate than some that would have been possible thirty years ago. On the other hand, the ruling opinion which now supports tariffs can almost forget the free-trade opposition to which not long ago it had to make some concessions. Such concessions to minority opinion provide the nearest approach in national life to a collective judgment. It is at least an admission that, until contrary opinions have either grown very weak or have been outlawed, they remain relevant and deserving of respect as part of the social context. This is, of course, a feature of social life upon which the democracies place special value. It is an admission that the disagreement of others



remains disturbing even though you have power to defeat them on an ultimate appeal to force. And the machinery of democratic government attempts to emphasize it by ensuring that there is always a chance that a defeated opinion may gain political power in future.

It is a commonplace that in time of war the range of permissible opinion on some topics is drastically narrowed. To a great extent this follows inevitably from the commitment of the nation to so decisive and unequivocal a policy as war. Any opinion tending to disturb the unity of the nation is likely to become impermissible. Nor is it simply that criticism of the Government becomes more difficult; in war as in peace the Government's own opinions and intentions may quite well fall outside the range of permissible opinion prevailing at the moment. Lasswell [1927] notes that in the war of 1914 the rule of the Allied censorship that laudatory publicity of generals must be confined to the commander-in-chief cut both ways: the narrow, inelastic public opinion which it created embarrassed the Government when it decided to supersede a commander-in-chief. He also cites the case of the German Government's acquisition of the Riga Islands from Russia at Brest-Litovsk:

"There was a great deal of objection in Germany among the parties of the Left to a downright policy of annexation, so the Government proceeded cautiously. The *Kölnische Volkszeitung* published a report that the English were negotiating with Russia for the right to occupy the Riga Islands. Instantly there were spon-



taneous editorials throughout Germany, demanding prompt action by the Imperial Government to forestall the accursed British. The Government took the islands."

One may mention the more recent instance of the British denials in 1939 that the restoration of a Hapsburg Empire was contemplated. Support for such an intention was outside the range of opinion generally permissible at that time, and even if it was being seriously considered it would still have had to be denied until the public had been more carefully prepared.

Here, of course, is one of the reasons for secret diplomacy; not only must third parties among the nations be kept in the dark, but one's own public must not be asked to extend its range of permissible opinion too suddenly.

The question deserves to be raised—even if it cannot at present be definitely answered—whether a wide range of permissible opinion is more manageable by a Government, or less, than a narrow range which outlaws inconvenient opinions. If it succeeds in genuinely restricting the range of permissible opinion a Government strengthens conviction in those beliefs that it does sanction; when, in response to the vagaries of governmental affairs, a different opinion is needed, it may be a little more difficult to bring it about. To offset this narrowness of opinion the authoritarian governments rely on an intensification of official propaganda. The assumption seems to be that if intense propaganda can create a narrow opinion it can also change it; and that therefore public opinion can be



narrow in range without being unduly stable or rigid.

Alliance with Russia may provide future historians with a useful test case. Lasswell [1927] regards it as a triumph of propaganda that in 1914 the British public, after years spent in denouncing the Tsarist tyranny, achieved the *volte face* of taking Russia as an ally in the war to save democracy. In 1939 the German public was asked for a somewhat comparable reversal of attitude to Russia. Some embarrassment was inevitable in both cases, but who can say whether the final result will be different? Under strict censorship and intense propaganda, the outcome of secret governmental measures appears with dramatic suddenness. And it may be that this quality in such events as the Russian trials of generals and the Nazi purges actually endears them to the public. They have the appearance of an emergency decisively handled. And there are not many people who lose faith in their doctor because he takes one glance and says that there must be an immediate operation.

Perhaps the crucial question for Governments is not what ruling opinion is reached, but what happens to the opposition view. Are they hidden only to become disruptive in tendency? Can they be dissipated by providing more welcome diversions for public attention? Or can the range of permissible opinion be allowed sufficient breadth to include the opposition views, which may after all be useful in future modifications of policy? In Britain it was noteworthy how readily the traditional hostility of the British and Rus-



sian imperial powers reasserted itself, in a new ideological dress, when the particular conditions of 1914 were removed.

In trying to understand the processes that lead to crucial political decisions, such as going to war, the supremely important question is how a ruling opinion emerges out of a wide range of permissible opinion. How does one of the many conflicting viewpoints come to the front? It is an elusive process. It will certainly be misunderstood if we think of public opinion as an assembly and numerical balancing of individual opinions. The abdication of Edward VIII gives a good example of what happens and—more important—of what does not happen. Here we know from the outcome what view of the facts was agreed to, or widely enough acquiesced in to obviate national disruption. But if we ask how this opinion established itself, in what way it was related to other permissible opinions, and in what way the advocates of each view expressed themselves and indicated their numerical strength and social influence, these questions seem unanswerable.

The chief feature of newspaper opinion, as Kingsley Martin has pointed out, was its division—and seemingly well-matched division. One or two clues to the opinion of sections of the public can be found. Kingsley Martin mentions, for instance, the apathy among South Wales audiences viewing news-films of the King's recent visit amongst them. Such clues, however, seem too slight for any weighty deduction to have been made from them alone; one might have supposed that the South Wales



attitude was balanced by London demonstrations in support of the King. But no simple addition and subtraction among the available clues seem to give any conclusion, and in the end we feel that the whole affair has become intangible or slipped through our fingers. On these occasions some national action is finally taken, and if we agree with it we say, as *The Lady* said, that public opinion has triumphed, and if we disagree we say, as Low suggested, that the public was gagged.

What actually happens on these occasions? Some people, no doubt, do just think and talk and read about the matter, form an opinion, and leave it at that. But most people, and almost all who have any public responsibility, begin at once to make intuitive judgments as to what other people would do in given eventualities. "Talking it over" is not simply a way of hearing other opinions expounded, but a way of measuring their social strength. The person who does this may be quite unaware of it. His calculation as to what such-and-such people would do if so-and-so happened may emerge in the form of his own opinion on the rights of the case. And he will pass on his conclusion to other people who are also assessing the social strength of the various points of view. As soon as a public controversy breaks, people in key positions all over the country begin to register like seismographs. They may be party whips, election agents reporting on the state of feeling in a constituency to Members of Parliament or prospective candidates, reporters, editors and controllers of the Press, secretaries of



chambers of commerce or of local branches of Rotary, shop stewards sensing the attitude of men in a factory.

Now this is very different from a vast number of individual opinions being centrally registered and scoring their effect as if on a political totalizator—though this is the way many people conceive of public opinion. The calculation of the odds is going on at innumerable subordinate points in the hierarchies of public life. And this calculation means not only discovering people's opinions but also very delicately assessing their social power in relation to the power of their opponents. Moreover, it is not primarily concerned with what people think. It is rather a judgment as to what they will do, and not what they will do *now*, but what they are likely to do in certain circumstances that have not yet arisen, perhaps in several different possible circumstances. This intuition further differs from a simple reflection of opinions, because it is bound to be affected by what the person forming it wants to believe, and also by what he knows or guesses of any machinery for propaganda that may be brought into action, or of any facts at the moment concealed but likely to be disclosed before anything decisive happens. The opinions that members of the public hold and could formulate at the moment may in fact count for very little among the factors governing the intuition. Men who have an accurate conviction as to the policy that will eventually be supported or acquiesced in may be quite unable to guess accurately at the numerical strength of rival opinions at the moment. For them to



attempt to assess the momentary "state of opinion" would be to abstract one clue from the constellation of clues, and so to interfere with the normal intuitive process.

And this leads to a further vital difference between such a network of intuitions and any snapshot of opinion at a given moment. For, simultaneously with having an intuition, everybody concerned begins to say things or do things which will affect the situation, to a greater or less extent according to the importance of their position. What they do may be anything from making a speech in the House of Commons down to winking sceptically when someone quotes from such a speech in an everyday argument. But at the same time, although they wink sceptically, they assess the effect which the speech has had on their companion, judging how little their hint can do, and so modifying their intuitive apprehension of what may happen. All this is something very much more fluid, and much more a social *process*, than the idea of a *state* of public opinion would suggest.

Obviously this interpretation of the facts is quite consistent with there being regular attempts by journalists and others to describe the state of opinion as if it were formed and fixed. These attempts may sometimes be made in good faith and may sometimes be deliberate propaganda. When an influential man says that public opinion will never tolerate some policy or other, the advocates of the policy rightly take him to mean that he thinks he can organize a sufficiently powerful opposition to obstruct it. An extract from



the *Evening Standard* of May 6, 1937, illustrates more explicitly than usual what happens:

#### THE CITY AND THE TAX

"The resolutions and protests against the National Defence Contribution proposals, which the Chancellor is receiving from nearly every company in the country, show that industry is now mustering its storm troops against the new tax.

"The mobilization has been rather slow. When the proposals were first made public on April 20th only two voices were raised against them. They were those of the *Evening Standard* and the *Financial News*.

"Chief credit for the opposition campaign goes to Stormtroop Leader Brendan Bracken, M.P. for North Paddington, and as chairman of the company, the man responsible for the policy of the *Financial News*.

"With his broad, square shoulders, fierce eyebrows, and shock of red hair he looks the part. He has played it, too, with a prescience and understanding of financial opinion which has made a deep impression on the City."

The reference to this man's "prescience and understanding of financial opinion" is especially revealing: it was *prescience* of an opinion he meant to create, and *understanding* of the state of affairs, and the potential trends of affairs, from which he would have to work to create it.

Such a view of public opinion may help to explain why politicians, in this country at any rate, strongly oppose any measurement of the state of opinion at a given moment. The general election is the most they can bear, and anything approaching a plebiscite is



abhorrent to them. Not only does a plebiscite give each opinion too nearly equal social power: it also gives fixity and definition to what the politician, for his methods of control, requires to be fluid, always forming and never formed. It was possibly this general objection, as much as more specific fears, which led many politicians to oppose the "peace ballot" of the League of Nations Union in 1937. The objection is to having the public committed to a definite principle instead of being left free to fall in with day-to-day interpretations of international events. That this view of public opinion and its repercussions in politics may be more pronounced in England than in some other countries, is suggested by a passage from the *Observer* of March 28, 1937, describing public opinion in the U.S.A.:

"Public opinion, however, is an extraordinary arbiter in modern America. It is expressed in a manner so direct that the phenomenon is almost as astonishing as the lengths to which the people will tolerate a condition of near anarchy. How it plays upon Washington is a fascinating study in itself.

"Members of Congress attend to the newspapers, but they pay most heed to their correspondence, which pours into Washington during every crisis. After a speech the President himself waits upon his letter-bag for the 'reaction.' After watching this public opinion in action, the foreigner feels himself in the presence of what Señor de Madariaga calls a statistical democracy."

Here what is noteworthy is not the American condition—which is, in fact, just what an over-simple conception of public opinion would lead one to expect



—but the British tone in describing it. One can almost see the *Observer's* lorgnette and lifted eyebrows. These naïve methods are not in the tradition of British politics. And if the American politician did rely heavily upon them it would no doubt be a mistake. For he would be isolating and underlining *one* out of the many clues that his intuitive judgment of political possibilities must depend upon. And of course the ease with which this particular clue can be faked by well-organized propaganda will presumably bring it into disrepute.

One further fact must be borne in mind. A ruling opinion has to secure the acquiescence not of “the public”—which is only a convenient short-hand term—but of many different publics. Each has differences of background and outlook, and each will acquiesce for different reasons and with different degrees of zest or reluctance. There are the broad differences between social classes, the divergent outlooks of the two sexes and of the different generations, the special interests and habits of mind of different professional groups (the prosperous business people, the doctors, the clergy, the farmers, the shopkeepers, to mention only a few), the diverse prejudices and convictions of the religious sects, the urban and rural outlooks, and even differences of sentiment between one part of the country and another. And this is far from exhausting the different groupings that go to make up a nation's extraordinarily heterogeneous “public.” These different publics overlap, and everybody is a member of several at the same time. In judging of one political proposal a man may be chiefly influenced by being a man and not a woman,



in another matter his being a farmer will count for more, in another he is pre-eminently a Methodist, in another he judges as a Welshman. And these are only some of the very obvious possibilities.

The surprising thing is perhaps that a ruling opinion, which allows the whole nation to act as a corporate body, ever can be arrived at. Clearly the equilibrium reached on any controversial problem is bound to be unstable. There are always internal forces tending to disturb it. Very slight changes in the external facts of the problem will strengthen one of the forces just enough to tip the balance and perhaps bring a complete reversal of ruling opinion. The changeableness that sometimes exasperates us in public opinion need not imply a great change in many individual opinions. It may only mean that a few groups of people specially concerned with the particular problem have altered in relative strength. A great mass of people, never well-informed or profoundly convinced, have thereupon shifted from one acquiescence to another.



#### CHAPTER IV

## Propaganda and Rationalization

In the absence of stricter techniques of observation than we possess at present, the writings of social scientists often reflect too uncritically the cultural trends of the moment. During the period when a rather poor insight into the workings of democracy accompanied trustful enthusiasm for it, the orthodox attitude to public opinion was also one of deep respect. Gradually realizing (as the cultural trends altered) that public opinion was not such an impressive thing as they had thought, many writers still had a lingering conviction that it *ought* to be; in seeing it palpably wrong so often they felt that it must have been led astray, distorted by some external influence not inherently part of it. The villain was easily identified: it must be propaganda. And in the last few years the view has implicitly been taken that if only we could expose and control the workings of propaganda we might see the pristine rightness of public opinion reappear.

Stated in these terms, the view is more naïve than



anyone would admit to having held. Yet something of the sort has been implicit in much of the attention—and especially in the tone of the discussions—recently devoted to propaganda.

It is an outlook which leads to the idea of propaganda as exclusively something *done to* the public; the propagandists are machinating bogies employed by central governments or “vested interests.” Such propagandists undoubtedly exist, and their works deserve the closest attention and the widest possible exposure, if we value reason and intellectual integrity. But their influence before and during a war would be immeasurably diminished if it were not for the eagerness with which the public helps to dupe itself.

In the main it dupes itself by the unconscious process known as “rationalization”—that is, it devises pseudo-rational justifications for beliefs and attitudes to which it is in any case committed. Sometimes a genuine reason can easily be discovered. But, if discovery fails, then unconscious invention—often of surpassing ingenuity—will infallibly come to our aid. The current term “wishful thinking” describes, of course, one form of rationalization.

Once a nation is committed to war almost everyone will support the national effort. A few will openly oppose it. Some will support it from motives of prudence while secretly disagreeing with the ruling opinion. But the vast majority will remain solid with their fellows and find themselves personally believing that war is inevitable in view of the enemy's conduct. Once they reach this stage their warlike attitude will for



long maintain itself through the process of rationalization.

It was Trotter (following Ernest Jones) who gave the term rationalization its currency in social psychology. Ironically, the very book in which he describes it contains an example of just such writing as provides the war-time public with its rationalizations. Lasswell [1927] treats it simply as propaganda:

“In what purported to be a scientific treatise on the *Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War* (London, 1917), Trotter solemnly said, ‘The incomprehensibility to the English of the whole trend of German feeling and expression suggests that there is some deeply rooted instinctive conflict of attitude between them. One may risk the speculation that this conflict is between socialized gregariousness and aggressive gregariousness.’ ”

If Lasswell implies that Trotter was a deliberate propagandist masquerading as a scientist the charge is grotesque. The cautious phrasing of Trotter’s suggestion should perhaps clear it even of the charge of being, for its author, a rationalization. Many of his readers, on the other hand, would certainly accept it with less than the necessary caution simply because it served to rationalize their war-time attitudes. For this reason such writing must be brought within our general view of propaganda. Yet it clearly belongs in a different category from exploits like that of inventing the “corpse factory”:

“Two captured photographs chanced to come to the desk of the Chief of the British Army Intelligence,



Brigadier-General J. V. Charteris. One of them showed dead German soldiers being hauled away for burial behind the lines, and the other showed dead horses on their way to the soap factory. Knowing the reverence of the Chinese for their ancestors and the uncertainty of Chinese opinion towards the Germans, he thoughtfully interchanged the titles of the two pictures, and sent the edited material to Shanghai for release. 'German cadavers on way to soap factory,' soon found its way to Europe and America and spread distaste and contempt of all things German." (Lasswell [1927].)<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly such writing as the passage quoted from Trotter, sincere, and offering a means of rationalization, has the same *effects* as deliberate propaganda. In fact this kind of writing may well be an absolutely vital adjunct to official propaganda. Yet those who provide it are not employed as propagandists or exposed to any specific pressure or bribery. They are indistinguishable from the public they form part of. Their work is simply one of the means by which the public spontaneously persuades itself that its cause is just. H. D. Lasswell, in his study of propaganda in the war of 1914, makes no distinction between such rationalizations and the deliberate propaganda of State agencies. The two certainly merge, but they are quite distinguishable and can best be discussed separately.

Of deliberate State propaganda we can say at once

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller account see Ponsonby. General Charteris is said to have told the story in New York and to have confirmed it when his speech was reported by a newspaper. But after returning to England and having an interview with the Secretary of State for War he repudiated it. There is little doubt that the cadaver story was a deliberate invention by somebody.



that its functions are what we should expect and its methods quite familiar. Lasswell's material shows the propagandists of each belligerent State engaged in trying to persuade their own people and the world as a whole of three things: their moral rightness in the quarrel, their military effectiveness, and their amiable intentions when victorious. At the same time they are using every possible means to disintegrate the enemy State.

Their own moral rightness is most easily suggested by blackening the enemy. It is his policy which has inevitably provoked the war, he has prepared for it, and his aggressive ambitions are a threat to the freedom of nations; he is also guilty of atrocities and of breaches of international law. Lasswell's description of this process as "mobilizing hatred against the enemy" slightly telescopes the facts; at the conscious level the primary aim seems to be to mobilize the strongest possible disapproval of the enemy and to produce hatred only in consequence. It may well be that propaganda merely provides a respectable outlet for an already strong charge of unconscious hatred, but this is a view that must be argued on other grounds and finds no support in the facts of propaganda taken at their face value.

To give the impression of military efficiency and economic strength is of course one of the main functions of the censorship and of other official influences on the treatment of news in every belligerent country. Detailed accounts of the varied methods employed for this purpose are given by Lasswell. They include—among many other means—simple lying, the failure to deny false but convenient rumours (which may have been gene-



rated unofficially), the delay of bad news till it can be offset by good, and the interpretation of military news in a way that minimizes the reverses and magnifies every success. In some circumstances it is undesirable to exaggerate the national strength: it is bad for their morale if the public expect a walk-over; it will also disappoint them unduly when reverses occur; and in the attempt to secure neutral help the belligerent must sometimes strike a delicate balance in suggesting that he is desperate enough greatly to need help, but strong enough to make good use of it.

Propaganda of these two kinds is well illustrated by a remark of Siegfried Sassoon's about popular beliefs in September, 1914:

"Many of us believed that the Russians would occupy Berlin (and perhaps capture the Kaiser) before Christmas. The newspapers informed us that German soldiers crucified Belgian babies. Stories of that kind were taken for granted; to have disbelieved them would have been unpatriotic."

In this remark are condensed what Lasswell discusses as the illusion of victory, the satanism of the enemy, and (for the naïve) the personification of the enemy. The compact unification of the nation is also implied in the social pressure making for credulity.

In dealing with his country's policy and war aims the official propagandist has two main objects; to secure and maintain unity with allies, keeping clashes of interest in the background, and to assure neutrals of his country's non-acquisitive and considerate intentions towards them.



Propaganda addressed to the enemy stresses the wrongness and dishonesty of their rulers, the hopelessness of the struggle, and the completely satisfactory peace which the propagandist's State intends to establish. The grievances, real or imaginary, of discontented elements in the population or of minorities within the enemy's empire are fomented, and these sections are promised justice when the war has been won. Every effort is made to undo the national unification which war brings about. Lasswell [1927] reports that in the war of 1914

"The Germans appealed to every possible cleavage in the French nation, seeking to instigate party versus party, farmers versus urbanites, provincials versus Parisians, workers versus employers, the army versus the nation, the army versus the Government, and the legislature versus the executive."

When the enemy is weakening, attractive peace terms become especially important. Lasswell regards President Wilson's formulation of the Allies' peace aims as one of the triumphs of propaganda in the war of 1914. It may not have been planned primarily as a weapon of war, but in conjunction with the propaganda designed to demoralize the German armies it contributed a great deal to the disintegration and collapse of the German Empire. These aims of propaganda are the natural, inevitable aims of a warring State. For a more detailed study of them Lasswell's *Propaganda Technique in the World War* should be consulted.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also the more recent short account by F. C. Bartlett [1940].



The same study provides a great variety of material showing the means employed by propagandists. It is probably on this subject that the layman expects most from a psychological analysis. He assumes, reasonably enough, that the first step in immunizing the public from propaganda (of the sort he disapproves of) is to expose the propagandist's devices. But, although this is a good beginning, far too much is sometimes expected of it. Exasperated at the duping of the public, the more naïve student of affairs feels that the propagandist must be using sinister tricks which could be exposed and discredited once and for all.

Unfortunately, perhaps, the fact that most needs emphasis is that no unfamiliar psychological principle is ever involved in propaganda; the propagandist can employ no weapon that is not perfectly usual in everyday argument and gossip. Since when have people argued their own case impartially? The reports we give of the simplest everyday happenings are bound to be selective; and who expects anyone to select facts unfavourable to himself? Do sales bargains grow less impressive in the telling or captured fish smaller? As for reported conflicts and disputes, is the teller not always blameless and the trouble none of his making? Are the crushing retorts he made quite free from touching-up? Is it certain that he suppresses no points where he got the worst of it?

The political and journalistic device of passing on the useful rumour without taking responsibility for it is nothing new. Where the broadcaster says, "According to unconfirmed reports reaching Paris from a neutral



source . . .” the back-yard scandal-monger says, “Of course I don’t know what truth there is in it, but they do say that she . . .” The Press flatters its readers; the man in the bar says, “Now you’re an intelligent man, Mr. Brown, and I ask you . . .” Politicians and newspapers claim to be speaking for a vast body of opinion (“the unanimous conviction of the nation,” “the rising tide of public indignation”), and what is this but the familiar device of everyday argument “Why, everyone knows . . .,” “Everybody would agree . . .,” “You ask anyone . . .”?

So one could go on, through all the devices of the propagandist, and find for each its humble parallel. It would be too much to expect that after all these years people should have discovered really new ways of duping one another. All we can say is that the politicians and journalists have immensely greater opportunity and adroitness. They make full use of their advantages. The extent of the duplicity practised by the most reputable newspapers and politicians in all countries was becoming a commonplace, between 1918 and 1939, to people of any literacy. Lasswell’s study of propaganda and Ponsonby’s *Falsehood in War-time* bring together in the most compact form facts which came to light in all directions as soon as peace-time attitudes to truth and falsehood were restored.

But the typical post-war attitude to these commonplaces of war is not reasonable; it partakes too much of a childish protest against being deceived by parental figures who ought to know better. Governments and national newspapers are not *in loco parentis*. They are



merely prominent parts of a State which is far greater than they and far from being within their control. When peace comes we never reproach the soldier for his killing. It is no more reasonable to reproach the politician or journalist for his distortions of the truth and his selective reticence. They form part (even if at times an ill-judged part) of his contribution to the national effort. This is bound to be so, on account of the conflicting and incompatible ambitions, both within each State and between allies, which must be yoked together in a united effort if the war is to be won. The facts have not changed since Sir Henry Wotton wrote imprudently that an ambassador was an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country.

The reaction against propaganda is indeed very often childish. It must always be childish to demand the *truth*, quickly, on problems so vast that the facts would be hard to gather and assemble under the best of conditions—and where actually the facts are at all times being concealed and distorted by interested parties. The ease with which facts are quite innocently misrepresented may be illustrated from a report on conditions in Britain in 1939 published by the reputable American magazine *Fortune* and quoted without correction by *News Review* (January 25, 1940):

“During the first days of September, whenever an unidentified plane appeared near the east coast, an air-raid warning was sounded all over the United Kingdom, and 45,000,000 Britons were supposed to take shelter. Work in factories was suspended until the all-clear was sounded.”



Close on 45,000,000 Britons could have told the journalist that this was not true. This curious error could be committed and circulated although (a) the facts were common knowledge, (b) they were not subject to censorship, and (c) there was neither emotional tension nor, as far as one can judge, vested interest to encourage the misunderstanding. In more important matters the facts are hard to come by, strongly charged with emotional meaning, officially censored, and distorted by countless people with axes to grind. Under these conditions, to demand that the daily paper should give the truth about the manœuvrings of huge States is on a par with believing in daddy's omniscience.

In addition to the difficulty of merely discovering the truth, every newspaper quite naturally and inevitably presents the facts with selective emphasis. To complain of this is again childish. It is most unlikely that the people who complain would be capable of any stricter intellectual integrity if they were in charge of the Press. But, though the complaint may be silly, the degree to which selective emphasis occurs should certainly be recognized. An example of it on quite a trivial occasion is more useful here than one involving important issues. *The Times* and the *Daily Telegraph* reported on April 13, 1939, the prosecution of an old lady for keeping twenty-six dogs without licences. The *Telegraph's* report began:

"The Hon. Mrs. X—Y—Z—, of . . . , was fined £52, with costs, at Hailsham, Sussex, yesterday, for keeping 26 dogs without licences at Hurstmonceaux.

"Mrs. Z—, who is 73, is the eldest daughter of the late Lord P—."



*The Times*, on the other hand, began:

"Mrs. X—Y—Z—, of . . . , was fined £2 at Hailsham, Sussex, yesterday on each of 26 summonses, a total of £52, and was ordered to pay costs of 15s. 7d. for keeping 26 dogs without licences at Hurstmonceux."

Concentrating its attention on the financial details and the arithmetic of the case, *The Times* omits all reference to the defendant's connection with the peerage, even at the cost of a discourteous derogation of her style. The *Telegraph* continued:

"She was represented by Mr. E. R. Burder, who pleaded guilty. . . . He appealed for leniency for her."

"CHAIRMAN'S REPLY—

"The Chairman, Lt.-Col. R. V. Gwynne:

" 'Here is a woman with "a handle to her name" who was fined heavily last autumn for the same offence and yet you come here and ask for leniency. . . . It would be a good thing for the police and everybody else if this woman stopped keeping so many animals.' "

But *The Times* merely noted:

"When Mr. Burder asked that the case should be dealt with leniently, the Chairman, Lieutenant-Colonel Roland Gwynne, said: 'It would be a good thing for the police and everybody else if this lady stopped keeping so many animals.' "

There were other significant differences between the reports, but those quoted are enough to show the tenderness of *The Times* towards the peerage. *The Times* might well argue that its report put the case in a truer perspective. The rights of the matter are not in question



here. What is important is the care which a good newspaper takes, even in handling so trivial an incident, to see that its presentation of the news is in line with what it regards as the right point of view. The cumulative effect of this kind of care, day after day, is incalculable. And if this can occur over the eccentricities of an old lady in peace-time, how can we hope for the "objective truth" about international affairs?

The possibilities of error and distortion being what they are even in ordinary conditions, it is understandable that one characteristic of war-time publics should be the extraordinary spread of rumour. Most people are in a state of heightened emotion and are rather tensely concerned with every scrap of news that they can get. Some have an outlook of anxious optimism, others a sort of prudent dejection that leads them to prepare themselves for the worst. Both will welcome eagerly any item of news that suits their outlook, so that optimistic and pessimistic rumours both gain currency. The scarcity of genuine news and the secrecy which is maintained (the limits of which nobody knows) give added appeal to rumour. It follows that the purveyor of "inside information" will have more prestige than he has even in normal times, and there is no lack of incentive for such people to pass the whisper on; the prestige-hungry satisfies both himself and the news-hungry at the same time. The hearer will readily believe, because his emotional need for one or other sort of news has reduced his critical vigilance. And moreover, the topics on which he most wants information are often ones that he knows next to nothing



about. How many of us, for instance, can rightly judge of Mr. Winston Churchill's statement in 1924 that

"Poison gas of incredible malignity, against which only a secret mask (which the Germans could not obtain in time) was proof, would have stifled all resistance and paralysed all life on the hostile front subject to attack [if war had continued into 1919]."<sup>1</sup>

How many of us could judge the plausibility of the "death-ray" story of 1939? How many of us knew enough about military tactics to say whether invasion by parachute was really a formidable possibility?

These factors help to explain why so many people snap up rumours and pass them on with amazing zest and credulity. They are in a position very similar to that of a patient in a hospital, anxious about his condition and desperately snatching at hints in what he thought he overheard the doctor saying to the students. The factors are the same in both cases: strong emotional need of news, scarcity of official information, and not enough technical knowledge to assess the scraps of information that are picked up.

Rumour and propaganda share a common background: the inevitable ignorance of the ordinary citizen about the over-size State which controls his life and secures his loyalty. There must always be some delay between the currency of a rumour or a piece of propaganda and its exposure. In most cases it will have done its work before the exposure comes. All that the student of affairs can do is to provide a running commentary, constantly bringing us as nearly up to date as

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ponsonby.



possible concerning the latest guises of the familiar manœuvres and the latest distortions of particular facts. In time of war and in the quasi-war conditions of totalitarian States this exposure is prevented. Only in the period of reaction from war, before the nations are bracing themselves for the next struggle, can the detailed exposure of propaganda go forward.

If insight into the workings of propaganda spreads and the publics of the world grow more sceptical, the central Governments will have to rely less and less on deliberate, consciously manufactured propaganda, and more on the unconscious rationalizations of sincere partisans whose attitude will be completely free from the professional propagandist's cynical detachment. These rationalizations will be no less effective.

Once a State is at war there are very few of its citizens (apart from "Fifth Columnists," whose interests have identified them with the enemy State) who can calmly accept the idea of its being defeated. They may be opposed to war in general. They may have violently opposed the particular war of the moment. They may be most anxious to end it as early as possible and be deeply opposed to much of the Government's policy. But nothing will seem to threaten their positive values so seriously as national defeat and submission. From the moment war has been declared this gives a Government a tremendous hold over the nation, even over malcontents and the Opposition. On those who have not opposed the policy of war the effect is even stronger, and nothing that can tend to weaken the national effort will be countenanced by them—no thought, word, or deed.



The upshot is that almost everyone becomes in effect an agent of propaganda for the Government, or at least for the national machinery of war. This tendency is further reinforced by the fact that the most powerful people and organizations in a social group have what may be called a need for "centricity." Their power depends on their being near the centre of national life and interest and not banished to the periphery. Paradoxically it is the most powerful organizations which are the least able to follow a path of their own once the nation is irrevocably committed to war; they have too much to lose if they should ever become, in the literal sense, "eccentric."

It is this fact that brings about the astonishingly sudden unity of a nation when, after a period of violent schism and hot dispute, one faction manages to carry the nation to an irrevocable decision. The abdication of Edward VIII illustrated the point in relation to the Press. Kingsley Martin points out that as soon as the abdication seemed unavoidable, the papers which had most vigorously opposed it began to prepare their readers to accept it. The Press is compelled to come into line with every important decision that it cannot successfully resist. It may hang back as a drag, but in the end it must acquiesce with fairly good grace, whether in increased national armaments or in a change of king. No important national organization dare risk going off in a corner and sulking.

The Churches provide the most striking examples of the way that institutions with social power are bound to become propaganda agents for the Government when



a national war has been undertaken. An established Church which stood on one side or actually opposed a war, when the nation as a corporate body was committed to it, would have lost its power and place in the community by the time peace came. It would have become a minority movement. It is only because it is content to be a minority movement in this culture that the Society of Friends is able to stand aside from national wars, and not merely deplore war.

And so, as each new war arrives, we find the Churches giving their familiar support. Lasswell [1927] notes that in 1914

"It was of some advantage to the war party in Britain to have such a statement as the following, from the Bishop of Hereford: 'Such a war is a heavy price to pay for our progress towards the realization of the Christianity of Christ, but duty calls, and the price must be paid for the good of those who are to follow us. That better and happier day when the people now under militarist rule shall regulate their own life is doubtless still so far away that an old man like myself can hardly hope to see it dawning, but amidst all the burden of gloom and sorrow which this dreadful war lays upon us we can at least thank God that it brings a better day a long step nearer for the generation in front of us.' (London *Times*, August 12, 1914.)"

Similarly, on the day that war was declared in 1939 the Archbishop of Liverpool assured his congregation that

"In fighting for liberty we are fighting in defence of faith and fatherland, and may with clear conscience implore the divine blessing." (*Liverpool Post*, September 4, 1939.)



To the typical post-war outlook (such as Lasswell's, for instance) the priest's encouragement of the warrior appears exceptionally ironic. Religious teaching has made some of the chief contributions to the development of sensitive social interests and values, the very values which have to be most violently set aside in the prosecution of a war. It naturally seems inconsistent for the Churches (and sometimes the same Church) to urge on both sides simultaneously to more convinced efforts of war. One is prone to forget that the Churches also stand for ideals in the name of which wars are fought, and are themselves therefore caught in the inherent dilemma of war. Moreover, we must remember that besides standing for certain ideals, the Churches are prominent parts of our present social structure, closely knit with and dependent upon the corporate life of the State. In common with all such bodies they have strong incentives to retain their centrality.

Like other writers, Lasswell is especially struck by the eagerness of men of letters, scholars, and scientists to engage voluntarily in war propaganda for their national Governments; after the Churches', these people's propaganda is the most generally surprising when glanced back at from the vantage-point of peace. In the post-war disillusionment with war, it seems to be the supposed intelligence and intellectual interests of such people which make their support of a war incongruous. Even if there is a conflict between the values of the "higher scholarship" and the institution of war, we can still easily understand their supporting the national effort when we realize how intimately they too are



shaped by and dependent on their social matrix. As writers with a large public, as responsible members of Universities which depend on State grants and on endowments from prominent citizens, they would all be penalized in some degree if they tried to swim against the current. Moreover, they are not merely writers or scientists or scholars; they are also conventional members of their social group, their eminence itself being a guarantee that in certain essentials they are "dependable," or, in Trotter's phrase, "resistive."<sup>1</sup>

The Churches and the representatives of the "higher scholarship" are only rather striking examples of the tendency for everyone who is firmly knit with his State to become an instrument of quasi-propaganda in time of war. It is not propaganda which the Government has to concoct and spread deliberately. It is a spontaneous rationalization of what the group finds itself doing. The tremendous strength of a well-knit social group depends to a great extent on this process of rationalization.

This being so, it is important not to misunderstand the process or conceive of it too simply. In particular it does not go on in three distinguishable stages. Over war, for instance, it would be wrong to think that most people first feel complete repugnance, then feel the pressure of herd opinion, and then devise a rationalization (e.g. "Most wars are futile, but *this* war really is forced on me in defence of my ideals"). I doubt whether any such distinguishable stages occur even unconsciously. The moulding effect of the group is there from

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter IX.



the beginning, at the very inception of thought about anything.

Trotter's views perhaps countenanced the idea that herd influences distort judgments which the individual originally forms independently. More recent psychological work rather alters the emphasis. Sherif, for instance, has shown experimentally that our thinking and even our perceiving take place in a social matrix from the very beginning. We do not start with "independent" thinking which is subsequently socialized. The way we see events depends as fully on their social setting as the way we see a patch of green depends on whether its background is blue or yellow; and, just as only a few people train themselves to observe the full visual conditions of their colour perceptions, so only a few train and sensitize themselves to observe even a small part of the social conditions of their judgments.

Churchmen and academics are like everyone else in this. All through their professional lives they have built up habits of compromise, rules for tempering enthusiasm, conventions of drawing the line, which serve to maintain a pseudo-reconciliation between certain of their ideals, often hostile to the established social order, and their respected positions within that same order. It is this background which enables them in time of war to give that sincere support of the national effort which alone ensures their continued centrality.

If even these sub-groups give their support it is no matter for surprise that every other organization of any power and importance in national life must do the same. The result is the remarkable cohesion of every



warring nation (cf. Chapter VIII). The poorly informed and imperfectly literate sections of the public can be unified with relatively crude propaganda. Those whose education and information might breed scepticism are those who must most carefully maintain their social centrality, and they will evolve their own rationalizations for doing so.



## CHAPTER V

# War as a Cultural Product

THE fact that many people's acquiescence in war is reluctant or blind must not be taken as proof that war gives them no satisfactions. We have to examine the possibility that although they resist war it none the less holds out invitations, perhaps obscure invitations, of a positive kind. Among the possible attractions of war the most obvious is that it requires us to attempt a violent and extreme form of domination and that this in itself may be a direct satisfaction. It is this point which has probably roused more controversy than any other connected with the psychology of war.

We may examine first a bold denial that there is any such direct satisfaction to be gained from violence. Surveying our knowledge of primitive peoples, W. J. Perry has advanced a theory which boils down in popular thought to the claim that "natural" man is completely peaceful and that there once really was a Golden Age when wars were unknown.

To begin with, Perry recognizes that violence may offer important gratifications of an indirect kind, especially social prestige, in any culture which has accepted it. Once established, it will also seem a perfectly natural



way of settling social differences, such as disputes over property. But he does deny that violence can ever be satisfying in and for itself alone, and above all he denies that it arises spontaneously in social life. As an exponent of "diffusionist" theories in anthropology, Perry lays immense emphasis on the part played by historical accident in the growth of civilization, and has little faith in a "natural course of development" of social customs out of the interplay of the human mind and its environment. His theory of war is a striking expression of this point of view. Wherever war occurs, he believes, it has been learnt from the representatives of one particular civilization. In that civilization it grew up through a cultural accident. And this applies not only to war but to violence of any sort, even between individuals.

"Throughout the ages," says Perry in general terms, "peoples of lower culture have learned their violent habits from contact with peoples of higher culture." And he believes that the anthropological evidence supports the view that no violence occurs among societies of lowliest culture—the food-gatherers and the lower hunters. There are a few exceptions, but these he is satisfied that he can explain away as due to contact with war-sophisticated cultures. Where war occurs, as it almost universally does among primitive peoples of more complex culture, Perry believes it to be an appendage of other institutions.

In the main, he regards it as an appendage of the "dual organization." Roughly stated, his theory is that an ancient civilization which arose in Egypt colonized



most of the world. The customs of what we call primitive peoples (other than the lowliest) are not the early shoots of a civilization which has started to sprout spontaneously; these customs are fragmentary survivals from the ancient civilization. Now a prominent feature of the Egyptian civilization was its political organization as a united kingdom of Upper and Lower Egypt, and between these two areas there was tension and hostility, expressed partly in ritual form.<sup>1</sup> This "dual organization" went everywhere with the colonists, and in Perry's view "carried with it a definite obligation to be quarrelsome." A second institution—that of head-hunting—also led to fighting. Here again the violence gave no direct satisfaction, but was the only means of getting heads for ritual purposes.

The whole diffusionist theory is obviously very debatable and must be left to anthropologists to appraise. But Perry might be totally wrong in his general theory and still have expressed a sound psychological intuition concerning violence. From the psychological point of view his central assertion is that violence—whether between communities or individuals—is only a cultural accretion, arbitrary and accidental. If so, it has no direct psychological roots or spontaneous growth. It only acquires secondary psychological meanings which help to perpetuate it.

The weakest point of the theory, psychologically, is

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the general theory of the ancient civilization see Perry [1923]. For a systematic discussion of violence as a psychological and cultural phenomenon see Perry [1935], from which all the quotations in this chapter are drawn.



its bold assertion that even violence between individuals is a cultural product. But this extreme assertion is a necessary part of the theory. If violence between individuals did develop spontaneously it is most unlikely that some sort of violence between families and between larger communities would not develop out of it; and Perry is therefore obliged to deny the psychological spontaneity of inter-individual violence as well as of war. And to the suggestion that even individual violence is an arbitrary cultural importation there are several objections. One objection, not in itself conclusive but at least making for scepticism, is that animals certainly fight among themselves, and it would be surprising (though not totally incredible) if human beings were free from such a common animal impulse. Perry indeed admits, rather regretfully, that occasional instances of violence between members of the community are reported even among food-gatherers; he can only insist that it is rare and is not accepted as part of the social machinery of the group. A second objection is the continuity there seems to be between force used against inanimate obstacles, force used against animals (as in hunting), and force used against human obstacles. This last use of force is not so different from the first two as to require an historical explanation of its origin, and there is no suggestion that the first two are not spontaneous developments.

Finally there seems to be no line of demarcation between violence and other forms of domination by force. Killing a man or injuring him with a weapon is obviously violence; so presumably is beating or kicking



or punching him; from a punch there are imperceptible gradations to a violent push, or a slap administered to a child; instead of a slap there is the threat of a slap, passing by degrees into a frown or a scolding voice; instead of a push there is threat and command by voice or gesture. In fact there seems to be a smooth transition from the violent to the less violent forms of forcible control and coercion. It seems possible that Perry would claim that even the forcible control of children by parents was a cultural accident; he certainly suggests that slapping children may be. But he has not shown that food-gathering peoples were unfamiliar with the use of coercion of some kind in bringing up children. It seems unlikely that they would be. It is unlikely because forcible control to keep a child out of physical danger would inevitably be resorted to, and to use the same means to prevent his doing something "wrong" or annoying would surely occur to everyone spontaneously.

This is perhaps the greatest difficulty for Perry's theory. Violence is only one form of domination by force, and although forcible domination is not the only means of handling social differences it is one that easily develops out of the parent's necessary control of the child in early life. Reinforced by the other objections this difficulty suggests that, taken literally, the complete theory is not tenable. But it would be mere pedantry to leave the matter there. For Perry undoubtedly has relevant contributions to make to the problem of war.

One subordinate but very important contribution may be mentioned first. He makes a distinction, which



too many psychologists have neglected, between force used with hostile intent and force used in emulative and friendly contest. With this distinction in mind he rightly objects to Bovet's well-known suggestion that even such games as chess express in modified form the "instinct of fighting" or the "instinct of pugnacity." The slipshod use of ideas like "pugnacity," "self-assertiveness," and "aggressiveness" to cover *both* hostility and *also* emulation (or what might be called companionable competition) is a fruitful source of misunderstanding. They stand for social relationships that can be clearly distinguished. Emulation implies an "integrative" agreement between the two sides to exercise one another and to see who is better at a pursuit they both value. Hostility is a "dominative," coercive act, or a forcible attempt to resist coercion. The one unites; the other disrupts. Confusion between the two ideas is the more difficult to avoid because friendly rivalry changes so easily, at least in our culture, into resentment at defeat or dominative satisfaction at victory. Our modes of bringing up children produce so much baulked aggressiveness that this can cause no surprise. Even so we are sufficiently free from aggression for the difference between hostility and friendly rivalry to be perfectly evident.

The distinction is of importance on account of a suggestion sometimes made that we might find harmless alternative outlets for aggressiveness. R. Money-Kyrle, for instance, writes:

"Are we less likely to want to fight wars if we play football? Or does football awaken our desire for a



grimmer outlet for destructiveness? To be still more frivolous: what would happen if wife-beating became a socially sanctioned and popular amusement? Such questions raise the general problem of whether destructive impulses can be deliberately diverted into something comparatively safe. To a certain extent I think they can."

The practical outcome of such suggestions is a little difficult to see. More important, they ignore this difference between emulation and hostility. Wife-beating would no doubt release aggression. But the traditions of such games as football (not only among us but among some primitive peoples as well) so stress the importance of keeping one's temper, playing fair, being a good loser, and so forth, that the upsurging of real hostility is a matter for reproach and guilt in the player. Conflict over one's aggression in these games may be severe—far worse, for instance, than in struggles with a business rival. Thus it would seem that when people talk of finding alternative outlets for aggression they are often really asking for the aggression to be converted into something else—into integrative behaviour, in fact. If a mere change of outlet is found—such as wife-beating—the net gain over war is dubious.

It is of the utmost importance to recognize, as Perry has done, that emulation need not involve hostility or any disruption of the social bond. Inflicting physical pain on a companion may be a perfectly sociable act in boxing and wrestling, just as winning his money at bridge may be. In all such competitions someone is defeated; but if he has accepted the conventions that



permitted the competition he must still, even if ruefully, maintain social relationships with the victor and look for his revenge only within the framework of the same conventions. The victor may need tact in order to dissipate the chagrin of the vanquished, but he is not doomed by the fact of victory to sacrifice companionship. All in all, these forms of emulation, far from being a sanctioned outlet for hostility, are a test of the competitors' skill as social beings (cf. p. 96).

But Perry's chief contribution to the problem is his insistence on the institutional nature of much of our violent behaviour. The popularity of his theory is itself of psychological significance. It seems to reflect a widely held, if confused, conviction that in some way our violence runs away with us and goes beyond what we really want. However sceptical we may be of the complete theory, Perry's emphasis on the divergencies between one culture and another in their institutions of violence is of the utmost importance. From amongst a mass of anthropological material that he draws attention to, it is worth while quoting reports on two strikingly contrasted peoples. From Hose and McDougall, Perry draws the following account of the Punan of Borneo:

“ ‘The Punan is a likeable person, rich in good qualities and innocent of vices. He never slays or attacks men of other tribes wantonly; he never takes a head, for his customs do not demand it; and he never goes upon the warpath, except when he joins a war-party of some other tribe in order to facilitate the avenging of blood. But he will defend himself and his family pluckily, if he is attacked and has no choice of flight.’



“ ‘Fighting between Punans, whether the same or different communities, is very rare; the only instances known to us are a few in which Punans have been incited by men of other tribes to join in an attack upon their fellows.’ ”

“The punan wander about in bands of relatives, numbering from forty to sixty. One of the elder men is the leader, but ‘his sway is a very mild one; he dispenses no substantial punishment; public opinion and tradition seem to be the sole and sufficient sanctions of conduct among these Arcadian bands of gentle wary wanderers.’ . . . ‘Harmony and mutual help are the rule within the family circle, as well as throughout the larger community; the men generally treat their wives and children with all kindness and the women perform their duties cheerfully and faithfully.’ ”

In contrast consider the Jibaro Indians, of whom Perry quotes a description :

“The Jibaros no doubt at present are the most warlike of all the Indian tribes in South America. The wars, the blood-feuds within the tribes, and the wars of extermination between the different tribes are continuous, being nourished by their superstitious belief in witchcraft. These wars are the greatest curse of the Jibaros and are felt to be so even by themselves, at least so far as the feuds within the tribes are concerned. On the other hand, the wars are to such a degree one with their whole life and essence that only powerful pressure from outside or a radical change of their whole character and moral views could make them abstain from them.”

The need for insisting on the fact that man-made custom produces wars is still strong. What Perry is rightly concerned to discredit is the sort of view ex-



pressed as recently as 1938 by Sandiford in a textbook of educational psychology:

"In animals that seem to love fighting for its own sake, the male is bigger and stronger than the female. In this class of fighting animals, man must be included: in fact, the difficulty of establishing peace on earth may be attributed to the pugnacious instincts of the human male."

This, fortunately, is not a fair specimen of scientific (or "academic") psychology, but the fact that it can be circulated in a widely used textbook shows that Perry is by no means flogging a dead horse.

And the error occurs in subtler forms than this. Perry well illustrates the profound effect of our institutions on our thinking when he criticizes a statement by Rivers about the peaceful Todas of the Nilgiri Hills in Southern India. Finding that they had allowed the weapons which they previously possessed to go out of use, Rivers says, "Here again it is easy to see why the disappearance has taken place, for on the Nilgiris the Todas have no enemies, either human or feral." But, as Perry points out, "it is not strictly accurate to state that the Todas have no enemies, so that they have ceased to fight. They certainly are surrounded by other peoples, but they do not fight them." The latent tautology of Rivers' statement (they do not fight because—they do not fight) illustrates our cultural preconception that we fight because some external power has provided us with enemies, and not, as the fact is, because we and someone else have entered into enmity with one another.



Our difficulty in fully accepting this idea goes back to the fact that we live in a dominative society. War is therefore only a high-light of our habitual way of handling disagreements. We feel that we would only too gladly manage without war itself, but to abandon the general dominative pattern on which it is based seems out of the question. The dominative pattern strikes us as so "natural." Thus it can only be with the greatest difficulty, if at all, that we entertain the idea that our dominative behaviour is an institution which our culture has devised and which we are perpetuating. It will be as difficult for us as it is for a neurotic invalid to believe that his incapacitating illness is a creation of his own. But we may perhaps find it easier to conceive of the possibility if we approach it from the opposite direction and consider some of the psychological devices which we have *not* had the misfortune and shortsightedness to institutionalize.

Take this very matter of hysterical illness. No one labours at creating a water-tight logical case against neurotic invalidism; and no one replies that he *must* resort to it in order to avoid being victimized by his friends' threats to resort to it. On the whole we are able to see that the game is not worth the candle. We let ourselves be occasionally victimized by the neurotic. We make no attempt to reply in kind because we can see that other ways of getting considerate attention are in the end more satisfactory. Invalidism can be met with this detached attitude because, unlike aggressiveness, it has never been institutionalized on a wide scale. And this is not because it was incapable of being



institutionalized; in fact on a small scale it has been. We all know families in which competition for attention and consideration goes on mainly in terms of out-invaliding one's rival invalids; and it is a matter of serious concern to psycho-therapists at the present time whether the payment of workmen's compensation for occupational neuroses may not be tending to institutionalize these troubles. However, we have managed not to develop this institution of hysterical illness on an extensive scale, and we may be thankful that the world at least avoids periodic schism into rival hordes of the helpless.

From this point of view it seems just conceivable—to indulge for a moment in utopianism—that we might reach a state of society in which, although domination would sometimes occur and we should be victimized, efforts at resistance would seem so palpably silly that only a neurotic minority would engage in them. Other methods of keeping a satisfactory social balance would be preferred, and we should be like Piaget's boy of ten who set "forgiveness above revenge, not out of weakness, but because 'there is no end' to revenge." But of course the very idea seems fantastic. And this is a measure of our cultural misfortune.



## CHAPTER VI

# War and the Aggressive Impulses

IN outlook and tone the psycho-analytic discussion of war is in complete contrast to Perry's theory. His emphasis is on the state of innocence before the Fall; the analysts think more about the contemporary infant's load of Original Sin. Their account of war is based on the premise that everyone possesses a constantly replenished reservoir of unconscious hatred and destructive impulses. Where does it come from? The analysts are not completely agreed. Some say that aggression is inborn, of the same psychological status as any instinct, and demanding expression as unconditionally as any. Other analysts (in common with many general psychologists) take the view that it arises mainly—perhaps exclusively—as a result of other impulses being thwarted. But this difference of opinion is not of much account in the present problem, since those analysts who hold that aggression is conditional on frustration believe that extensive frustration must so infallibly occur in infancy that a fund of aggressiveness is established in us all. "Much frustration," says R. Money-



Kyrle, "is of course inevitable—the infant's desires are too atavistic to be satisfied in any imaginable world." They thus reach agreement that, however it may arise, everyone grows up harbouring a fund of unconscious aggression, which is more or less precariously held in check by a number of psychological devices.

Leaving for the moment the psycho-analysts' formulation of their case, we can observe much in everyday life that is perfectly consistent with their theory in its general outline. If cruelty, malice, jealousy, and resentment are needed to bring wars about, "peace-time" life provides them in abundance. And, as the analysts point out, these hostile attitudes and intentions are very commonly entangled with others, equally strong and equally genuine, of the opposite kind: kindness, admiration, generosity, helpfulness, self-sacrifice. The irritations and jealousies are directed against people for whom we also have affection and whom we should in some circumstances be genuinely glad to help. The result is then that our hostility is not the righteous, wholehearted hostility that we might feel against, say, a malarial mosquito or a bubonic rat; it tends to be guilty and disowned.

Most people of ordinary insight have at least some inkling of these confusions and self-contradictions of feeling. It is not surprising that they should occur. They are bound to be generated by the inevitable conditions of our early life. Our birth completes the eternal triangle—ourselves, our mother, and her world. It sets us to learn a modified, workaday sociability in place of the boundless togetherness with another life that we experienced



before birth. Before birth presumably we could not value it. But the tribulation of birth must give us some vague but intense sense of a contrasting state of peace. And this inevitably becomes associated with mothering, for the mothering of infancy brings partial relief from the discomforts and alarms of the world and partially soothes our furious protest. Lest this view should seem a gloomy distortion produced by psycho-analytic influences it may be advisable to quote Blake's account of the matter in 1794:

"My mother groaned, my father wept:  
Into the dangerous world I leapt,  
Helpless, naked, piping loud,  
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

"Struggling in my father's hands  
Striving against my swaddling bands,  
Bound and weary, I thought best  
To sulk upon my mother's breast."

Thus the first social bond forms. We have to put up with the world, but at least we can cling in complete dependence upon the one available consolation. Yet soon the conditions of life, and our growing perception of them, demand a less intense and more diffuse social response. We have to tolerate sharing our mother (and any assistant ministers), sharing her not only with the material world in which she is unaccountably interested, but also with other people to whom intolerably she gives the attention and affection on which we have so desperately depended.

Learning gradually that he cannot possess his



mother's affection exclusively, the child is bound to pass through a stage when he feels some resentment at the claims which others have upon her. He may, if this psychological weaning is not fortunate, become a furious and frustrated victim of what he feels to be usurpation. Or, more impressed by the hatred he feels for his rivals, he may be filled with guilt and anxiety, and be unable to make easy and completely secure contact with other members of the family, who are, after all, the victims of his unconscious design of usurpation if not annihilation. In feeling his way towards a workable sociability the child's worst task is to realize that he must "go shares" in affection and that he can do so securely because there is plenty to go round. Many people never do, throughout their lives, learn to tolerate the fact that their friends have other friends. But the child is expected to learn the lesson quickly, which means persuading himself that he is reconciled to it long before his profounder protests have died away.

It is not to be wondered at that submerged confusions of attitude occur, and that they persist long after infancy and childhood, complicating every social experience of our lives. Our love gets entangled with a guilty resentment at not being the only object of the loved person's attention; our likings go side by side with jealousies of the people we like; our helpfulness alternates with malicious impulses towards the same person. And, of course, it is always the affectionate, or admiring, or unselfish attitude which is given full attention and full scope for conscious development. The hostile and



destructive impulses are pushed as far out of sight as possible. But the fact that these latter exist produces a malaise in us, a guilty tension, which we cannot altogether dissipate. Our social life has not been fully learnt. Indeed, it is a form of skilled activity that many people never come near to mastering throughout their lives.<sup>1</sup>

This is one aspect of the human beings who go to war. And the analysts can scarcely be wrong in asserting that it has tremendous significance in affecting our attitudes to war. Their view is, briefly, that when we have been provided with a complete enemy whom we can hate wholeheartedly and righteously we are then able to love our friends wholeheartedly too. We are free from the tension of unconscious hatred, and from the guilt and anxiety that that breeds. Not only do we direct against the enemy the hatred we have been tempted to feel for our friends, but we also aim at him the hatred that we have felt for our guilty, hating selves.

One of the clearest statements of the view has been given by Susan Isaacs:

"The reciprocal relation between loving one's friends and hating one's enemies can be plainly seen in many sides of ordinary social life among adults, too. The most impressive example is patriotism in war-time. The flame of national devotion burns far brighter when men's hearts are drained of hatred and aggression

<sup>1</sup> See, as a background to the whole problem of war in its unconscious aspects, Ian Suttie's *Origins of Love and Hate*, one of the most illuminating contributions to social psychology that have been made in recent years.



towards their own countrymen by the common enemy. It was this that made possible the exaltation of self-sacrifice felt by so many patriots in every belligerent country during the early days of the Great War."

And continuing:

"At a later point, I shall have to make clear that my account of group hostility as it stands here is too simple. When I come to the discussion of *Guilt and Shame*, I shall try to show that more than a mere *displacement* of one's hostile feelings from friend to enemy is involved. The mechanism of projection is also at work. The hated enemy is not only a substitute for the friend; he is a scapegoat too, a representative of my bad self. *It is he hates my friend, not I*. I hate and condemn *him* for his hate to my friend, and feel justified in doing so by my own loyalty."

These two quotations provide a convenient, condensed statement of the psycho-analytic theory of war. Edward Glover's widely read *War, Sadism, and Pacifism* expounded the theory more elaborately but without departing from these basic themes.

The least developed part of the theory is what might be called the "bridge passage" between the individual's unconscious aggression and its expression in the institution of modern warfare. But Glover gives some general indications. The majority of the population, he thinks, have arrived at a balance. The hatred they direct on the world around them is not so intense as to lead to severe outbreaks of violence; the antagonisms of everyday civilian life sufficiently express it. The residue which remains unconscious can be held in check without unbearably intense anxiety and guilt.



But some proportion of the population are less stable in the compromise they have come to, and their handling of the difficulty is more drastic. They have to discover in the world around them people or ideas or actions so thoroughly wicked as to deserve the full force of their unconscious hatred. The idea they take as their target may be war itself, and they become the more violent type of peace-fanatic. Or they may focus on a foreign State, an economic grievance, a political system, and convince themselves that here is the intolerable frustration which fully justifies all the hatred that possesses them. (And we should note that the unconscious hatred, infantile though it is, may be consciously expressed quite as well in tones of measured indignation as in ranting fury.)

Needless to say, the psycho-analysts anticipate the objection that, after all, economic, political, and strategic facts are real and cannot be reduced to mere pegs to hang our hatreds on. Their reply is that the real importance of these facts would probably be small if it were not reinforced by the significance given them by the nationalist's unconscious hate. But Glover believes that the extent of their "real" importance, as distinct from their unconscious meaning, will be a matter of dispute between analysts and other social scientists for a long time to come.

Returning to the thread of the analysts' argument, we reach the situation in which the unstable war-mongers have to persuade the more stable majority that a foreign State is behaving in such an intolerable way that it must be resisted by force. How do they do it?



The analytic theory gives no detailed answer, but it would no doubt be agreed that the whole machinery of propaganda and rationalization is involved. What the analysts would probably insist is that propaganda can be so effective because the majority of the population have achieved only a rather precarious balance in dealing with their unconscious aggression. They are readily persuaded of evil in the world outside them because that justifies them in releasing their unconscious hatred. Thus they gain relief both from the effort of repressing it and from the sense of guilt which its existence entails.

So we arrive at the situation which Susan Isaacs describes. There is no doubt that for the propagandists and rationalizers of any war the complete wickedness of the enemy—and therefore the wholeheartedness of the hatred he invites—is a point of prime importance. Atrocity stories play a major role, and if they are sexual in character so much the better. Our unconscious guilt has many sexual components and, if the scapegoat-enemy can also be saddled with those, the projection of our guilty self can be so much the more complete. Lasswell [1927] describes a great deal of propagandist effort in the war of 1914 under the chapter heading of "Satanism." And in 1939 the Archbishop of Canterbury asked his diocesan Conference:

"if we could doubt that the world was now confronted by the menace of a force which was really and truly evil? It was clear, he said, that we were using no mere language of exaggeration when we described this spirit armed with ruthless force as in truth satanic. Certainly



it was a negation of all that Christianity had tried to effect in the life of nations. Indeed, it was a manifestation of anti-Christ." (*The Times*, October 31, 1939.)

In such an atmosphere it seems highly probable that processes such as the psycho-analysts describe do occur to some extent in almost everyone, and in some people with great intensity. One trivial news item fits the analytic theories both of war and of occupational choice with such amusing perfection that it demands to be quoted:

"The eagerness of New Zealanders to serve overseas was shown at a meeting here, to-day, of abattoir and slaughtermen, who protested against being refused permission to enlist, on the grounds that the industry was essential." (Exchange Telegraph report, in the *Liverpool Echo*, January 17, 1940.)

When it comes to considering the behaviour of immense and diverse publics, however, we must be exceedingly cautious in the importance that we attribute to one single factor of this kind. And the question of how much and what kind of importance it possesses should not be a point of dispute between psycho-analysts and sociologists, for the relevant data have not yet been collected. It should be regarded as a psychological problem awaiting much more extensive investigation.

We can say at once, however, that the psycho-analytic theory of war is very far from being a complete account of the matter. Governments going to war know that they can depend upon and harness to their purposes many other motives than the unconscious ones



that Glover describes. It is relevant to notice, for instance, the eagerness with which psycho-analysts (as well as other psycho-therapists and psychologists) have indicated to the somewhat sceptical British authorities their willingness to further the national effort in the war of 1939. They do so, of course, from the best of conscious motives, and it would not be in place for me to examine those motives in the light of psycho-analytic theory. What this does illustrate, however, is the phenomenon noted in Chapter IV—namely, the concern of every public organization to strive for centrality, and the assistance that this gives the Government in war-time. For historical reasons connected with the rise of their movement, the professionalism of psycho-analysts is of an unusually intense and anxious kind, and their endeavours to press from the periphery nearer to the centre of public life are unremitting. Such a body is bound to do its utmost to make itself useful to the Government in war-time. This is only one of many important processes in the psychology of war-making which are not included among the factors to which the psycho-analytic theory of war draws attention.

None the less it would be absurd to under-estimate the unconscious factors. It seems certain that political figures and movements and States not only have their material and conscious significance, but are being taken up into unconscious patterns simultaneously. To the protesting under-privileged person the capitalist must almost certainly stand for other frustrating figures of infancy; to the prosperous but emotionally insecure person the Communist will almost certainly be one of



infancy's threats of deprivation come back. Visibility in the political and economic world is never very good (owing to the complications referred to in Chapter II), and we must expect all classes and professions to people the mist with spectral shapes thrown on to it from infancy. Nor—to repeat a previous reminder—must we let ourselves be misled by the dignified traditional form in which the infantile convictions may reach outward expression.

The psychological question is always what relative weight to give on the one hand to the conscious and on the other to the unconscious pattern, to each of which every event is assimilated and on both of which its significance depends. Often the unconscious meaning is of small account compared with the conscious. At other times it may loom so large that if it could be explored and dealt with rationally the event would dwindle to insignificance.

In war and politics the isolation of the conscious from the unconscious meaning of events will be enormously difficult on account of the complexity of the facts. The way in which a State may suddenly join hands with its *bête noire*, as both Britain and Germany have done with Russia in their time, suggests that highly charged emotional attitudes may rapidly be subordinated to strategic and economic considerations. And those who believe conscious factors to be of greater importance than unconscious ones have some support in the fair degree of persistence with which familiar alignments recur in the power politics of recent history, despite great changes in the political cloaks that the States



have donned. Those who believe more in unconscious factors can point to the persistence of wars despite increasingly widespread belief in their economic disadvantages for everyone, and despite increasing disillusionment as to their achieving that security for political ideals which is often represented as their chief object. Certainly economists and historians find it very hard to explain fully the occurrence of any war. The fact that economists and historians of State politics can explain so much and yet not make the problem fully intelligible suggests that for the time being we need to make up leeway on the side of psychological inquiry, not least into unconscious factors.



## CHAPTER VII

# The Compensations of War

THE psycho-analytic attitude to war has one general implication of great importance. It compels us to ask whether the whole of our personality—every remote corner and unfamiliar facet—finds war an unmitigated calamity. Once we admit that in some directions war may bring certain psychological compensations, it becomes necessary to look more closely at the texture of peace and examine its unsatisfactory threads more carefully. After all, we shall never understand a dipsomaniac until we discover what he finds wrong with being sober.

But perhaps this analogy is begging a vital question. Suppose war does bring its psychological compensations, are these really an invitation, which helps to bring war about, or are they not mere consequences, unforeseen and without influence on the pre-war public? It seems most unlikely that any large part of the public positively seeks war for the sake of the compensations it may bring. But some dim foreknowledge of them is inevitable, deriving from living memory and from social tradition. And what we must say is that the more a public is suffering from what Glover calls "the strains



of peace" the more its hold on peace must be weakened. The organization for war is carried out by sections of the nation who have to overcome resistances in very large masses of the public. We may recall Lord Baldwin's famous admission that his Government's intention to increase armaments had to be concealed in 1935 since he would otherwise have lost the election. The more completely people are enjoying their peace-time existence the stronger those psychological obstacles to war will prove to be; the more seriously their enjoyment of peace is flawed the weaker they will be. It is on these general grounds that we need to examine certain "strains of peace" that may find some temporary alleviation in war.

The psycho-analysts appear to believe that there is one basic formula for expressing the psychological change from peace to war: the displacement of aggression and the projection of unworthiness. It is perhaps true that all the distresses and difficulties which the coming of war may alleviate will affect unconscious aggression. We constantly find means, however devious and unconscious, for converting all our dissatisfactions into *blame* either of others or of ourselves. Along these lines one might be able to argue that the analysts were right in their basic formula. Even so, it is an exceedingly abstract formula, and there seems good reason for examining peace-time dissatisfactions in their rather more obvious forms.

Actual friction and antagonism in everyday life are too common to need more than mentioning; one has only to consider how many scraps of conversation over-



heard in streets and buses are recapitulations of dispute and conflict or complaints about other people's selfishness, stupidity, snobbery, presumptuousness, and undeserved success. This is the simplest outward expression of the underlying hatreds which, the analysts consider, war re-directs.

Slightly less obtrusive, but still quite easily observed, is the state of protest, more or less querulous and self-pitying, to which numberless people are reduced by their everyday difficulties. This state of mind is well summed up by the advertisements, widely used in 1939, showing a patient being assured by a doctor that such and such a treatment will relieve constipation; the sulky, protesting face of the patient effectively expresses the sense of grievance and undeserved misfortune that countless people carry about with them, whether they focus it on constipation or on something else. Now, mental exploration makes it certain that the particular grievance in such cases is assimilated to unconscious patterns of more general protest, and gains from them much of its intensity. When war comes people like this can feel that it is the national enemy who is wilfully spoiling the pleasant world to which they feel themselves entitled. The one major resentment is sufficient outlet for the unconscious grievance, and this relieves them of the necessity for some of the minor protests. The constipation or what-not may be as bad as ever, but their attitude towards it will be less querulous. This is one reason why so many people in the early days of war meet their difficulties cheerfully, "keep smiling," and make light of hardships.



A more pervasive dissatisfaction with civil life is a kind of boredom. Compared with peace, war brings an enhanced vividness in the reason for everything that happens. Peace-time activities get their significance in such roundabout ways that they seem to have only the dimmest reason for occurring. We may say we go to work "to make a living"; but the living comes very deviously, and the satisfactions of getting food when we feel hungry, shelter when we are wet, and clothes when we feel cold never come as the *direct* result of the work we are doing. So it is throughout our lives: the driving incentives have been spread out over a vast network of habits and routine, like a water-main feeding too many taps. Even where simple appetites and direct satisfaction do occur—as in eating and sexual activity—civilized life encourages the *regular* satisfaction of these needs, and we frequently eat because it is time for dinner rather than because of any hunger pangs.

Much sport, much entertainment, and much of the newspapers are attempts to correct this dimness of everyday life. Simplification of interest and concentration of attention exclusively on the salient features of a situation give the impression of vivid significance which is lacking in so many directions. War does the same. And when we say that young men enlist for the sake of adventure we are only pointing to the most obvious instance of a process that goes on very extensively. In a way undreamt of before, everyone thinks he can see the point of what is happening. Not only army recruitment, but even rationing and the blackout can, with competent propaganda, be shown as vivid



necessities. Political disputes gain point. And the newspapers can give most of their space to national affairs because national affairs have suddenly gained a vividness and comprehensibility equal to that of lawsuits and disasters.

This melodramatization of life shows itself in the sense that we are living in stirring times of historical significance: "What did you do in the Great War, Daddy?" The very title "The Great War" is illuminating in this respect. When calamities are given the title "Great," as the Great Plague and the Great Fire, they are at the same time given distinction. If we called the war of 1914 the Monstrous War or the Disastrous War the feeling tone would be different. The outlook that calls it "Great" is the outlook of those who feel that their experiences are "making history"—which to people of our generation means having news value for all time.

Next consider anxiety. Of all the strains of peace none is more prominent. Like antagonisms and grievances, anxieties gain much of their intensity from the unconscious patterns to which everyday events are continuously being assimilated. From the recent writings of psycho-therapists it would seem that the causes of unconscious anxiety may be more various than was suggested at one time. Fear of the dangerous impulses lurking in one's own nature and only precariously held down may be one cause. Infantile fears, both of retribution for unholy impulses and of actual external dangers (and of our inadequacy for meeting them), may also be responsible. And it may be, as one school



of psychotherapy believes, that the shock of birth stands as prototype of all the calamities that may occur. All this belongs to the detail of psycho-pathology. For more general purposes it is enough to observe that one main difficulty for the sufferer from neurotic anxiety is to get the measure of the dangers he faces. Punishment, external danger, inconveniently strong impulses have all been quite real in our lives. The neurotic reaction to them would be justified, however, only if they were much more overwhelming and annihilating than they really are. As adults we know that we have in fact survived the physical dangers of infancy and that our parents, however angry, did know where to draw the line in punishment. But in the neurotic the adult reassurances cannot get into gear with the unconscious dread which we want them to control. There remains a diffuse dread, as if something disastrous has not yet quite happened but still hangs over us, something that we cannot define or locate. Our everyday worries are just an earnest of the catastrophe that lies in wait.

Like antagonisms, everyday anxieties usually have rational causes. In people who are relatively free from unconscious anxiety the rational meaning of the event is the main part of the picture and the worry they feel is in due proportion. The feelings of the neurotically anxious person, on the other hand, are reinforced by the unconscious pattern of anxiety to which the real event is assimilated. The question is always the *relative* responsibility of the conscious and the unconscious patterns for the intensity of our feelings. Of the promi-



nence of the feelings, at all events, there is no doubt. Worry about employment, worry about social prestige, worry about good looks and sexual attractiveness, worry at not being married, worry at not being happy in spite of marriage, worry over children—how many people are quite free from all of these varieties of worry? Now whether we regard it as a curious phenomenon of psychopathology or as an obvious matter of everyday observation, the fact is that one big anxiety will often relieve us of a host of smaller ones.

Serious illness in the family, for instance, allows us to sweep out of mind innumerable small anxieties and cares, to brush aside the small neglected duties that had been nagging at us, to shelve small social obligations that we were beginning to feel guilty about. Nor is it just that our attention is momentarily distracted. For when we emerge from the larger anxiety and inspect our previous worries they still seem very much less substantial than before. The bigger misfortune, we say, has restored our sense of proportion: we realize, in other words, that the smaller worries were vents through which to discharge a diffuse anxiety that was bound to find outlet somewhere. This is probably one of the functions of much conversation about illness and death: contemplating the possibility of serious disaster gives at least momentary relief from the minor worries. In more pathological cases we know that the development of a specific phobia (of a particular disease, for instance) may completely allay the state of diffuse anxiety that had preceded it. And in general, whatever the ultimate interpretation, the fact seems to be that



one serious threat will canalize a tremendous amount of detailed worrying, and will—though at excessive cost in the long run—bring some degree of relief. It provides a *located* danger, and the diffuse dread need no longer seek outlets in the incidents of daily life.

Similarly in a war crisis, although people with rather severe anxieties may grow worse and perhaps collapse, many who suffer from only mild anxiety are able mentally to "clear the decks." They may hate the idea of war and feel great misery and fear, but their minor worries will, as they say, fall into the background. And it is minor worries, not overwhelming dangers, which have been wearing down their spirit in the years of peace. Moreover the unconscious process is undoubtedly aided by the real disorganization that war produces. External conditions suddenly render impossible many of the tasks that we had not been feeling quite up to or provide us in advance with an excuse for that failure which our sense of inadequacy always threatens us with. For the irrationally worried a real emergency is often a godsend.

In case I may seem to have exaggerated the boredom and anxiety and friction of everyday life, it may be worth while drawing attention to the significance of those pictorial strip advertisements which were used so extensively in the latter years of the nineteen-thirties and explained that the protagonist's irritability, apathy, spinsterhood, or occupational failure was the result of "night starvation" or some equivalent condition. Whether the products brought relief or not, the psychological conditions of anxiety, sulkiness, irrita-



bility, and protesting apathy were real enough for the advertisements to be perfectly comprehensible.

It is a commonplace that men who leave civil life for the army often speak of the relief which comes from having their responsibilities clearly defined and of knowing exactly what their job is and when it is finished. Not that the extreme type of over-conscientious, over-working man will be permanently free of his obsessional peculiarities in the army; but though he will continually work himself up into the old fierce self-driving, even he will probably find some relief, at least for a time, in the relatively fixed bounds assigned to individual scope and responsibility. The more usual mind, slightly anxious, a little bewildered, undoubtedly finds more permanent relief in giving itself up to the military organization. Sassoon makes it clear that the feeling may quite well survive great scepticism about the efficiency of the military organization, and may soothe not only peace-time worries but also doubts about war itself. Describing his return to France in 1917 after one spell of sick leave, he writes:

"As soon as the boat began to move I was aware of a sense of relief. It was no use worrying about the War now; I was in the Machine again, and all responsibility for my future was in the haphazard control of whatever powers manipulated the British Expeditionary Force. Most of us felt like that, I imagine, and the experience was known as being for it again."

This of course describes one of the attitudes commonly called "fatalistic."

In another way, too, military life and many aspects



of national life that become partly militarized by war provide relief from a particular kind of anxiety. That is in the sharp definition of authority and rank that marks the military organization. In civil life a great many people worry about what they call "holding their own." Have they secured all they are entitled to, have they pressed their claims, insisted on a just recognition of their worth? Would they have got a rise if they had pressed harder? Is it time they threw up this job where nobody appreciates their worth? Look at so-and-so, hardly learnt his job and promoted already! Such people, paradoxical though it may seem at first glance, often fluctuate between this state of mind and the apparently opposite one of feeling unworthy and inadequate and anxiously depressed even about their capacity for holding their present job. These difficulties spring from a deep uncertainty about one's own worth in relation to that of others. Infantile self-admiration and self-fascination meet severe shocks as the child grows up and they have rapidly to be excluded from his conscious calculations. Unconsciously they may linger with great persistence. In that case, one result is that no actual achievements can ever seem quite worthy of one's potential ability; they never satisfy the limitless pretensions of the unconscious narcissism. Another result is that any open claim even for reasonable recognition and esteem will produce self-consciousness and be uncomfortably inhibited, since it comes too near the prohibited area of "conceitedness" and might unlock the floodgates of narcissism.

People who suffer from these particular difficulties



may find compensations in war in two ways. If they can bring themselves to submit cheerfully to a military or quasi-military hierarchy, they are for some time freed from the gnawing fear that they ought perhaps to be pushing on faster, getting ahead. (Later this may change, and there will be the old bitterness over other people's undeserved promotions and the old hidden anxiety over one's ability to hold even the post one has, let alone the vastly more impressive position to which one unconsciously aspires. But it is the change from peace to the early phases of war with which we are concerned.) Moreover—and this occurs even more generally—war brings to many people a persuasive invitation to put aside their self-love and devote themselves to a common cause, so that again their own rights and claims take second place. R. Money-Kyrle formulates this fact from the analytic standpoint:

“The warrior is not merely fired by destructive impulses. He is also inspired by some ideal: love of justice, of his country, his leader or his comrades—indeed these so-called nobler motives are usually uppermost in his mind. It would seem that the ‘good’ part also of his super-ego escapes into the external world to drain away his narcissism and so leave him careless of self-preservation. Moreover, there is usually a masochistic element here, which helps to mask the sadism in the aggressive component of war fever. The impulse of self-preservation does not merely disappear; it is replaced by a definite impulse of self-sacrifice.”

Whether or not the psycho-analytic account of the unconscious mechanisms is enlightening, the fact is open



to common observation. Many people certainly are less self-absorbed when war comes.

To civilians the same compensation comes in a slightly different way. If they can agree with the established valuation of courage, endurance, and self-sacrifice in warfare they are provided with countless striking examples of these qualities, so striking and so far beyond what they normally expect of themselves that wholehearted and ungrudging admiration comes easily. They too are thus released from the gnawing concern for their own unrecognized merits, freed from the urge to compare themselves favourably with others, and are able for once to "lose themselves" in unflawed admiration.

There are still other compensations which some types of personality will find in the change from peace to war. Those who suffer a malaise at the comfort and luxury they enjoy in peace-time—either a general puritan malaise or a guilty awareness of the less privileged—may find themselves half-consciously regarding war as an expiation. Others are afraid of becoming "soft" and dependent on the luxuries of civilization. They must constantly make sure that there is nothing they cannot endure to be weaned from, and no external threat they cannot face. Cold baths, dangerous sports, and exhausting exercise can partly alleviate their insecurities, but war is the great challenge, and they cannot but welcome the opportunity it offers of testing and reassuring themselves.

So it might go on, a wearisome catalogue of compensations. They will vary from person to person, and



for some people there may be none at all. But the majority of any public are likely to find some compensating effect either in the simplification or in the increased vividness of existence as the nation passes from peace to war. We must bear in mind that a material complication may be far outweighed by the psychological simplification it brings. The blackout, rationing, difficult travelling, such inconveniences render the mere routine of existence something of an achievement and may—for a time—bring relief from the sense that one's daily life is humdrum and pointless.

We may readily admit that for many people a simplification of life is all to the good. Their peace-time life grows complicated not through developing interests, finer adjustments of attitude, subtler and more comprehensive insights, but through the elaborations of trivial interests, more intricate conventions and fashions, more involved symbolizations of the basic crudities of wealth and power—a multiplication of rules for the same elementary game. In such people's lives simplification implies a little less futility. Only the means by which it comes about can be regretted.

For other people—and for most people in certain respects—to welcome the simplifications brought by war is completely retrograde. Our more developed interests, our subtler and more balanced judgments, our more delicately adjusted attitudes, the standards that we believe in but have barely managed to live up to, these are extensively abandoned in favour of clumsier, less practised ways of living. Such a regression occurs the more easily where society creates an un-



congenial atmosphere for those who attempt a more developed existence and imposes unnecessary strains on them. Poor housing conditions, for example, obstruct efforts at hygiene; poor conditions in literary journalism obstruct good reviewing. Anyone who is trying to do work a little better than his social milieu can encourage and appreciate, is under the temptation to welcome an excuse for throwing up the sponge.

Unquestionably the "strains of peace"—to use Glover's phrase—are real and formidable. And for everyone alike, whether his life is developed or only complicated, these strains are incalculably aggravated by unconscious factors. But the fear of war is also real and formidable. A nation, therefore, which is getting near to war, but still hopes to escape it, subjects its public to the double strain of heightened anxiety about war without any compensating relaxation of peacetime standards. This is one factor in explaining the sense of relief that enters into the complex (or confused) feelings with which a public passes from peace to war.

These are the possibilities to be borne in mind in assessing the strength of the positive appeals of war. By themselves the compensations of war would certainly do nothing to bring wars about. Their importance lies in the fact that they lessen the determination with which the great national publics cling to peace. Their effectiveness is probably transient, but they do something to explain public feeling in the very early phases of a war and at any point when vivid danger brings about a sudden and drastic concentration of



national effort. People attune themselves, not without obscure satisfactions, to the anticipated simplification and melodramatization of their lives. This among other reasons helps to explain the undercurrent of disappointment—expressed in the phrase “the phoney war”—at the quiet opening of the war of 1939.



## CHAPTER VIII

# Social Unity in War-time

WAR simplifies the outlook of individuals, of classes, of professions and sub-groups of all kinds. And this helps to explain a phenomenon to which both politicians and psychologists have agreed to attach great importance: the increased harmony and social unity within each warring nation. With the probability of war in sight, the task of the propagandist and his allied rationalizers is pre-eminently to simplify. Differences and disputes between rival sections and classes in the community must be made to seem superficial compared with the fundamental issue in the name of which the war is to be undertaken. Among the events preceding a war, one that makes its appearance most promptly is the appeal for unity among parties and classes, coupled with the assertion that unity is already there.

"As early as July 29, 1914 [when the *Daily News* and other papers were still vigorously opposing British entry into the war], the *London Times* called upon all parties to 'Close Ranks.' The Kaiser united his people behind him, when he declared that he knew no party more. The Fascio came in Italy, and the *Union sacrée* was proclaimed in the French Parliament. The sensa-



tional appeal of Gustave Hervé to the ranks of Labour was broadcasted far and wide. Hervé was a notorious *sans-patrie* who had belittled patriotism as an instrument of capitalistic exploitation. On the very brink of the War he changed the name of his paper, *La Guerre Sociale*, into *La Victoire* and pleaded with all the ardour of his fervent spirit for unity. . . ." (Lasswell [1927].)

Politicians and propagandists may have to manipulate the facts before this unifying simplicity reveals itself, but the evidence suggests that the propagandist's work is partly done for him. It seems as if people are craving just that sense of unity for which propagandists are finding an urgent reason. A significant point is the promptness with which appeals for unity can be made. From Lasswell's evidence quoted above it seems that the appeal may be effective at the first hint of a common danger, and some time before the majority of the public are convinced of the danger they stand in. Lasswell himself ignores this point and implies that the call for unity comes only after hatred of the enemy has been aroused; but the dates of his quotations from the English newspapers suggest that this is not so.

This illustrates the double aspect of going to war. Fear and indignation are present, but so equally are mutual trust and the wish to work with others in a common task. No doubt some belief in a common danger must occur before the desire for unity can be effectively expressed, but it would be a mistake to suppose that the strength of this desire is in simple direct proportion to the strength of the fear. Going to war seems to involve trigger reactions: small events



will release strong charges of pent-up impulse. And the released impulses include the sociable and affectionate equally with the antagonistic. This is implied, though perhaps under-emphasized, in the psycho-analytic theory of war. Other theories of motivation, which affirm that sociability has a more direct psychological root than the Freudians believe, would tend to encourage still greater emphasis on this aspect of going to war. War releases hatred. But it also releases friendliness which has previously been smothered.

War is by no means the only event that does this. Too exclusive a faith in the psycho-analysts' theory would lead us to neglect the non-combative occasions when some degree of the same unity is achieved. Prolonged threats of national misfortune give a chance of observing the unity of feeling they produce among ordinary members of the public. A long spell of fluctuating fear and hope, such as occurred, for instance, when Amelia Earhart was lost and when the submarine *Thetis* was sunk, noticeably draws the public together. The unity of public feeling during the severe illness of George V in 1929 was very strongly evident. We must remember, too, the sense of cohesion in the British public during the Munich crisis of 1938, for this again was due to a common anxiety rather than a common object of hatred; the chief emotion of the time was fear of war and not hatred or fear of Germany.

Occasions like these bring together the different sections of the community into a common feeling more effectively than any others can, for the simpler fears and



regrets are least affected by conventional social divisions. However, it is not only occasions of gloom and anxiety that unite the public. Intense and simple pleasures are not so easily found as are intense and simple anxieties. But they do appear with some success in the big festivals like Christmas or New Year's Eve, when barriers between classes are partly broken down. Special events, such as a coronation or a royal wedding, have a similar effect, and so too on a smaller scale do such occasions as Derby Day, the Boat Race, or the Cup Final. The different social classes may celebrate their festivals with great diversity of manners and customs, but in the fundamentals of the festival they know that they are at one with everyone else in the nation. In one way or another every section of the public arranges periodic festivals in which some of the tension of ordinary social intercourse is removed by a common interest. In occasional hilarities and mild saturnalia people of all classes reassure themselves that they still have friends with whom they can be off guard and care-free.

The constant mark of these occasions is that the ruling interest is simple and can be shared by people of diverse outlook and temperament. The presents that are given, the games that are played, the causes of excitement or laughter—these all mean that we have agreed to lower the level of our interests for the time being. We reduce their complexity and variety and get back into touch with people who have kept to simpler interests or who have developed in different directions from ours. We try to concentrate on



what we have in common even with people we dislike.

Moreover, the pursuits that make festivals are of a kind that necessarily involve sharing rather than competing. The presence of others with the same object as yourself adds to the enjoyment instead of being a threat. Even the competition for good positions for seeing football matches or public processions is relatively good-natured and in any case does not form more than a small part of the total activity.

But admittedly a threat from the outside is the most effective means of promoting unity. It is so, at least, once a strong ruling opinion as to the nature of the threat and the best way of meeting it has been arrived at. The urgent need to know that others agree with your own view of the situation, and are bracing themselves to the same ordeal as you are, is likely to produce intense protest if you suspect that others put a different interpretation on events and are preparing for something different. This was apparently reflected in the highly-charged atmosphere of the House of Commons just before the declaration of war in 1939 when the Opposition feared that the Government might still decline to go to war. At such times the suspense grows intolerable if one's associates refuse to reduce the situation to the satisfactorily simple essentials, dreadful though they are, which one discerns oneself. On the evening before war was declared Mr. Arthur Greenwood, deputy leader of the Labour Opposition, said:

"There is a growing feeling in all quarters of the House that this incessant strain must end sooner or



later and, in a sense, the sooner the better. . . . If we are to march I hope we shall march in complete unity and march with friends."

The following morning when war had been declared he said:—

"The atmosphere of this House has changed overnight. Resentment, apprehension, and anger reigned over our proceedings last night, aroused by the fear that delays might end in national dishonour and sacrifice of the Polish people to German tyranny. This morning we meet in an entirely different atmosphere, one of relief, one of composure, and one of resolution. The intolerable agony and suspense from which all of us have suffered is over. We now know the worst."

And Mr. Winston Churchill said:—

"Outside the storms of war may blow and the land may be lashed with the fury of its gale, but in our own hearts this Sunday morning there is peace."

This was greeted with cheers. Without taking the speeches of professional politicians as pieces of reliable introspection, we may still suppose that these remarks corresponded to some genuine emotion among the audience for whom they were meant. The unifying emotion is even more apparent in the following passage from the Bishop of Liverpool's sermon, in which he spoke of those

". . . who had lived through one great war and twice since had been brought face to face with another. Had they not felt these three times that mysterious movement revealing convictions which they need not express because they knew that they shared



them with the vast majority of their fellow-countrymen? They lay too deep for words. Indeed, a national spirit or soul would hardly go into words at all. But it could be recognized by an attitude, a behaviour in the face of great events—events great enough to dissolve individual differences of temperament and opinion, and to make them realize that they were of one spirit.” (*Liverpool Post*, September 4, 1939.)

To some extent the peace of mind induced by a declaration of war is comparable to the relief that comes from knowing the worst in any situation which has set up severe suspense. But this is not the whole story. The sense of sharing a profound common concern with others is equally important. It persists for some time after war has been embarked on, and so long as the nation maintains its resilience the sense of unity will be revived by any intensification of danger.

Here again a politician's evidence may be quoted (though again without claiming too much for its scientific or historical validity). Mr. Lloyd George's speech when war was declared in 1939 included this passage:—

“I have been through this before, and there is only one word I want to say, and that is we have had very bad moments, moments when brave men were quailing and doubting. The nation was firm right through from beginning to end, and there is one thing that struck me then, and that was that in moments of disaster we were confronted with in the war I found the greatest union among all classes. All discontents and disaffections disappeared; by this means we went right through to the end.”



The essential fact is that a *simple* aim has for once become comprehensive and urgent enough to be accepted by everyone. As Lasswell [1927] says:—

“For the preponderating majority in any community the business of beating the enemy in the name of security and peace suffices. This is the great war aim, and in single-hearted devotion to its achievement they find that ‘peacefulness of being at war,’ of which Principal Jacks once wrote. In 1915 he glanced back over the first twelve months of the Great War, and observed that ‘the life of Great Britain has been acquiring a unitary aim of purpose. The aim itself is warlike; but it has been attended with some increase of mental peace.’ ”

The importance of a belief in the simplicity of the issue can be seen indirectly in the disillusionment of such a man as George Orwell when he met with some of the complexities of the recent Spanish Civil War. He joined the Government forces with the conviction that in Spain at any rate politics were bound to boil down to the one issue of Fascism and anti-Fascism. He describes his disillusionment when he found that actually he had joined only one faction of the anti-Fascist forces. In the end, after seeing his comrades executed or imprisoned by other anti-Fascists and after himself only just escaping, he had to make a considerable effort of detachment in order to decide that, by and large, he still hoped the anti-Fascist government would win.

National unity is an obvious political necessity, and the assertion that it has been achieved might be only a politician's device. It is unlikely that there is no more



in it than this. Foreign wars have notoriously been the last resort of tottering rulers to unify their nations, and it seems probable that the ruler can rely on a spontaneous craving for unity which will have very real force if it can once be touched off. Members of rebellious reforming movements may be even more susceptible than the ordinary public; their appetites have been whetted for unity and the conviction of rightness. Dame Ethel Smyth's account of the suffragettes' feelings in 1914 is relevant to this. She describes the readiness with which most of them switched over their enthusiasm from one simple cause to another—this one so simple as to blot out the difference between them and the rest of the community. She and Mrs. Pankhurst were in France, and she writes:—

“... we were none too certain that England would come in; and I remember feeling that, if she didn't, there would be only one thing for an English woman stranded in France to do—leap off those cliffs into the sea. . . . Mrs. Pankhurst declared that it was now not a question of Votes for Women, but of having any country left to vote in. The Suffrage ship was put out of commission for the duration of the war, and the militants began to tackle the common task.”

One source of national unity is sometimes overlooked. In the days of crisis before war is declared the predominant emotion of large numbers of people is fear of *war*, not of the enemy. Ironically, this very dread of war is one of the most potent means of releasing the impulse to friendly companionship, and so of enhancing that social compactness on which a modern war



depends. When people are certain that their associates have the same anxiety as themselves and see eye to eye with them on the essentials of the menacing situation, they can yield to friendliness with each other far more securely than at any other time.

When war has actually been declared, fear of the enemy may then develop among some sections of the population in an intense form. In 1914 the fear of invasion and in 1939 the fear of air-raids were powerful unifying factors. The transference of children from towns in 1939 was regarded very largely as a failure. In view of the tremendous psychological difficulties that such a scheme involved, I believe that what will cause most astonishment in future is its partial success. In England perhaps more than in some other countries the psychological meaning of the home and the family is pre-eminently that of a refuge and retreat from the strains of the external world. For many families, even visiting and receiving visits are ambivalent undertakings—pleasurable ordeals—and a slight sense of relief is felt when they end. For at least a large minority of people the sense of flight into the security and inviolacy of the home is tremendously strong, and forms an essential part of the psychological machinery by which they allay their anxieties and “keep going.” To them the break-up of their home, either by parting with children or by receiving them, arouses strong and only partially rational protest. It represents an intrusion of the external world into the one place that had seemed to be their own. What partly dissolved the psychological resistances was the unifying effect of an emergency and



a common fear, with the simplification of values which these bring.

To understand the unity reached by a nation in war-time we have to think not of one unifying process but of several different processes working at various levels of national life. Given a certain minimum of national cohesion when war comes (a minimum which France in 1939 seems not to have possessed), the large sub-groups within the State embark on that striving for centrality discussed in Chapter IV. Churches, the Press, political bodies, professions, and labour organizations realize that to retain their power in national life they must relinquish certain of their sectional attitudes. They must at all costs remain central, or they will be discredited. Moreover, if they seriously believe that their support is important for the nation's success in the war they dare not withhold it—for that would mean risking the collapse of the national structure into which they have built themselves.

Factors of this kind bring about the larger decisions of harmony. In 1939 the Conservative, Liberal, and Labour Parties promptly agreed to avoid by-elections during the war; the Independent Labour Party, being already on the political periphery, could afford to denounce the agreement as "a disastrous blow against the very principles of democracy" (*Manchester Guardian*, November 14, 1939). In war-time politics the tendency is inevitably towards coalitions or "national governments." The broad features of national policy are so stringently determined by the simplicities of the time that an opposition party is in danger of losing its *raison*



*d'être*. Even criticism of the capacity of ministers is handicapped by the need for secrecy in the conduct of war. The only effective step for the opposition is to enter the Government, doing so with as strong a suggestion of independent critical spirit as possible. And, since the best men are never likely to be all in the same political camp, the sectional interests of the parties may at such times be fully consistent with national needs. Similarly in the relations between workers and employers: in the wars of 1914 and 1939, for instance, it was agreed that there should be no strike or lockout in the Lancashire and Cheshire coal-field (employing 60,000 miners during the war). Here, as in other industries, the effort at harmony was no doubt aided by the wish of both sides to benefit fully from the war-time boom. As in politics, so in industry, many sectional interests coincide with national needs in time of war.

These broader features of national unification come about in fairly direct response to the external danger. The focusing of national effort on a more restricted set of aims, however, means that smaller sections and sub-groups which are not of any obvious national importance in war-time also feel their existence threatened. This has the effect of drawing their rival factions closer together in the hope of saving at least some fundamentals that they can all agree on. Thus in 1939 the Royal Academy organized a United Artists Exhibition:

"Nearly 1,000 artists have responded and submitted about 2,500 works for the 1,700 places available. All



the leading art societies, including the most daring of the modernists, are included, and it is part of the Royal Academy's bargain with the painters that each will be represented by at least one work." (*Sunday Times*, December 10, 1939.)

On some such pattern as this the smaller, more precarious minorities will focus their attention on the simpler concerns that unite them and will leave partly in abeyance the finer points that divorce them into warring cliques. Unity brought about in this way is really a response to the threat of neglect coming from the rest of one's own nation, not the foreign enemy. The aim behind it is to keep for the minority some foothold in the community's simplified life, but this greater harmony in the small specialist group becomes one element in the compactness with which the belligerent State faces its enemy.

Coming gradually down from the larger sub-groups towards single families and individuals, one sees the same thing happening almost everywhere. Professional organizations, universities, traders' associations, all feel the threat and all meet it in the same way. First their members sink their differences and concentrate on fundamentals. They may take special steps to maintain internal unity, such as the British Dental Association's plan for a percentage of the fees paid by evacuees being returned to the patient's usual dentist. Next the sub-group modifies its ambitions, drawing in its horns; universities cut down expenses, cancel plans of expansion, modify regulations so as to meet the needs of students whose work is disturbed by the war. At the



same time the sub-group in its shrunken condition concentrates its energies on demonstrating two things: its patriotism and its national importance. Only in this way can it hope to secure even the minimum of privilege and independence.

The upshot of the whole process is that the ambitions of quite specialized groups all come to contribute indirectly to the solidarity of the nation, in spite of the fact that the main motive in most of them is to preserve their identity and prevent their members being swallowed up into an undifferentiated national horde. This war-time phenomenon is only one aspect of the fact that States are rather arbitrary unions of aims and interests which in themselves imply no concern whatever in the State and its politics.

Among members of the general public a good deal of increased harmony comes again from the sharing of common misfortunes and discomforts, and from having to meet demands made by the State. Friends and relations draw together more closely when the friends they share join the active services. Marriages are arranged sooner than they would have been, but still with the approval of relations and with the unspoken sanction of ruling opinion. At business the staff is depleted by conscription, and those who are left, thankful to be left, help each other out more readily and make small sacrifices to enable the work to be carried on successfully.

Material discomforts, such as those produced by the blackout and impaired transport arrangements, also encourage greater mutual helpfulness and tolerance



among the public. It is not, probably, that people's impulses to help one another in simple ways are much greater in war-time. It is rather that simple assistance and simple companionship are more obviously wanted and we are relieved of the fear that our proffered help may be repulsed. We follow amiable impulses that we ordinarily check; for "stand-offishness" and social frigidity are far less likely when most people's outlook has been simplified by common discomforts and troubles. In this respect the friendliness of a war-time public is no different in cause from the neighbourliness and mutual helpfulness that may be produced by a severe frost, frozen pipes, and snowbound roads. By this means the minor discomforts which cause grumbling against the authorities and the war are at the same time enhancing the public unity upon which the efficient working of a belligerent State depends. There comes a point, of course, where the discomfort of the general public and the threat to the prosperity of the community's sub-groups begin to have a disintegrating effect. But for a time, and perhaps a long time, very varied processes are working—some of them paradoxically—to increase the psychological compactness of the State. In varying degrees the same process is going on in all the belligerent States, so that they are all braced internally at the same time as they threaten each other from without.

In these circumstances the disintegration which each belligerent aims at producing in the enemy State is long delayed. In warfare that threatens civilians as well as soldiers with violent death the physical dangers



themselves help to close the gaps between Government and governed. Many of the small wars that occurred between 1918 and 1939 showed the unexpected toughness of a social group's resistance to violent attack by an overwhelmingly powerful enemy.

The resistance and continued loyalty of civilians under direct attack probably depend on two things. The first is the obviousness of the enemy's malignancy. The more direct his onslaught the less plausible are his offers of generous treatment in return for submission. The second is the production of a military attitude in the civilian population. The collapse of civilian morale occurs when the army is unsuccessful and the populace, though distressed and weary, is still politically minded. But direct attack on civilians encourages a more military discipline and obedience among them for the sake of self-defence. They look to the Government to instruct and organize them for their own protection, and by doing so they increase both their mutual cohesion and their reliance on the existing Government.

The advances in offensive warfare that have made the large-scale attack on civilians possible appear to have brought their own reply. The extra vividness of the enemy produces greater psychological resistance in the civilian population. An enemy whose influence is felt mainly through restrictions and rationing schemes imposed by one's own Government is in the best position for eventually persuading the weary population to accept his generous peace proposals. A public exposed to these inconveniences has daily evidence of the failure of its own Government without any vivid



demonstration of the enemy's power or the Government's difficulties. War-weariness makes the public begin to wonder whether the war is as necessary as it seemed at first, and what exactly it is that they are fighting. But an air-raid puts the doubts at rest; we are fighting an organization of people who are dropping bombs among us. Not only the identity of the enemy but the reality of his attack is literally brought home to us. It may be difficult to convince the public of the triumph of regaining a scrap of no-man's-land that was lost three years ago, but the importance of fighting off or bringing down a bomber over one's own city needs no emphasis by propaganda.

But, even at its height, the harmony achieved by a large belligerent State must be very imperfect. Profiteering, jobbery among bureaucrats, inequalities of privilege and sacrifice—these will be grumbled at from the very beginning of a war, and the grievances will grow more bitter as hardship and discomfort increase. Friction will increase between troops and the military police, and the troops will be suspicious and resentful of civilians (cf. Chapter XI).

These feelings take some time to develop. Army organization is based upon the same social hierarchy as the peace-time social order, and its influence for a time strengthens that order. Moreover, the death and courage of some members of the privileged classes give both troops and civilians an impression of equal sacrifice from all classes. For a time national unity is automatically enhanced by war. It is only much later that the Government and the powerful classes are held



responsible, instead of the enemy, for the troubles that the war has brought.

For survival under these conditions the essential quality of a social group is plasticity. Those with power and privilege must know how to yield tactfully and unobtrusively just before they are forced to. A simple example, occurring perhaps surprisingly early in the war of 1939, illustrates the sort of mechanism that may be expected to operate very frequently. Faced with acute congestion of traffic, London Transport decided to abolish first class travel on most of the services in the London district. *The Times* of October 31, 1939, reports the following explanation:—

“The retention of first class carriages on the Metropolitan and District lines reduces the accommodation for the passengers as a whole, and leads to an unequal loading of trains. The prevention of third class ticket holders riding in first class carriages has also become extremely difficult, and it is almost impossible to ensure that holders of first class tickets shall enjoy the privileges and comfort for which they pay extra fare.”

This, in little, well illustrates the processes that are certain to occur in a modern belligerent State in one form or another. Revolution and collapse may be avoided. But some shift of power and privilege is certain,



## CHAPTER IX

# Cruelty in War-time

THE psychology of every war is different. This reminder ought to appear as a footnote to every general statement. But nowhere is it more urgently needed than in discussing the indirect effects of war on public conduct. There is no standard war-time public. The public goes to war in many moods, and the condition that it happened to be in and the trends that were in progress when war arrived will do much to determine what the war-time public will be.

As an example of the difference between one war and another, take the attitude to enemy spies. One would imagine from Lasswell [1927] that a spy-hunting mania could be anticipated in the early days of any war. "The thesis of surprise attack is rendered plausible to the civilian population by rumours of enemy spies." He then gives several instances of popular excesses in spy-hunting in the war of 1914, and concludes: "The spy mania is a great inconvenience to many people, but it helps to arouse the community to a deeper sense of the necessity for joint action in the crisis." But in 1939, in spite of an obtrusive censorship and official warnings, no such spontaneous outbreak occurred in



Britain. Even in 1940, after the demonstration of "Fifth Column" activity in neutral countries, the rounding up of possible enemy agents was an organized Governmental measure and not the popular sport that spy-hunting had been in 1914. It would no doubt be quite easy to find some explanation of the difference, but the difference itself would have been most difficult to predict. Who could have said with certainty, for instance, how the presence of so many alien refugees would affect the public? In face of such complex phenomena as national life presents, social psychology is still, unfortunately, in the state where plausible explanation comes easier than reliable prediction.

Even when resemblances between one war and another are found it must be remembered that they may to some extent be due to deliberate imitation of what was done last time. Shopkeepers, song-writers and comedians, restaurant managers and many others, whose success depends on guessing what the public will like, find themselves confronted with a public which feels that its way of life has undergone a violent change with the declaration of war. It has no idea what it wants to do, but it feels that some new adjustment is called for; "everything will be different now." This feeling runs far ahead of the new adjustments that are actually demanded. Those who cater for the public do the only possible thing to meet this frame of mind. They try reinstating the modes of the last war. So in 1939 the old songs were revived and new ones modelled on them; the old encouraging sermons were brought out, though with a little more stress on preparing for



peace; the broader humour that the public was expected to want appeared before there was time to ask for it; and a shop here and there, unusually wide of the 1939 mark, pasted the French and British flags on its windows in imitation of the bunch of Allied flags that had been so popular in the previous war. The general public too showed the same tendency; many women in 1939 looked forward with gloomy satisfaction to the certainty of food queues and made their shopping difficulties a staple of gossip long before they had really loomed large.

These are only my personal impressions. Checking them is a matter of difficulty, because this mechanical reinstatement of conventional war attitudes and habits is something that no one will confess to. I believe it has *some* importance and that resemblances between one war and the next may therefore be partly fictitious. But unless the reinstated habits found some justification in contemporary needs they would presumably be rather short-lived. Here, however, every opinion is at present speculative. We can only note the necessity for bearing in mind both the obvious differences between one war-time public and the next, and also the possibility that such resemblances as there are may have no very profound significance.

In short, it is very risky to assert of any given tendency that it is bound to show itself when a public goes to war. With this caution in mind we may inspect the general probabilities.

One effect follows from the simplification of public concerns and the vivid conviction that meeting the



single external threat must take precedence of every other consideration: there is a widespread attitude of "cutting the frills" and getting on with the job without bothering much about who gets inconvenienced in the process.

Bureaucrats are able to be a little more brusque and to do their job in their own way without bothering quite so much about the goodwill of the public. Minority views which have been respected in peacetime and allowed to complicate public organization are now brushed aside. For example, the Sunday Entertainments Act of 1932 was a cumbrous compromise which permitted the opponents of Sunday film shows to put towns to the trouble of an elaborate poll of the ratepayers before such shows could be licensed.

"Now the concentration of troops in parts far from their homes and the shift in population caused by the removal of children and parents from the towns make a fresh approach to the problem essential. Local authorities will therefore be empowered to permit the Sunday opening of cinemas, if they think conditions in their area demand it, without the expense and delay of a poll." (*Manchester Guardian*, December 8, 1939.)

In other more dramatic ways the standards of consideration for individuals are lowered by war. The road deaths resulting from the blackout in 1939 are a case in point. Commenting on the third of these deaths which he had dealt with in one week, the St. Pancras coroner remarked:

"It is a commentary on present-day facts that drivers can go into the witness-box and say they just



could not see. It is a position which is apparently temporarily accepted, although I don't say accepted with complacency." (*Sunday Times*, December 10, 1939.)

In all directions the same trend appears, of abandoning the complications and restrictions which interfere with the simple way of doing what we mean to do.

The simple way may involve brutality. Brutality will therefore appear. Sassoon mentions a major he met in the war of 1914:

"His rough-and-ready philosophy was refreshing, and he was a wholesome example of human inconsistency. He was a good-hearted man I felt; but his attitude towards Conscientious Objectors was frankly brutal. He described, with evident relish, his methods of dealing with two of them who had turned up at the Rifle Brigade Depot. One had been a tough nut to crack, for he was a well-educated man, and the authorities were afraid of him. But the Major had got him run in for two years' hard labour. He'd have knocked him about a bit if he'd been allowed to, he said. The other one was some humble inarticulate wretch who refused to march. So the Major had him tied to the back of a waggon and dragged along a road until he was badly cut about. 'After a few hundred yards he cried enough, and afterwards turned out to be quite a decent soldier. Made good, and was killed in the trenches.' He smiled grimly. Discipline had to be enforced by brutality, said the Major; and, as I have already remarked, he wasn't amenable to argument."

Not only in the belligerent's own army, but in its treatment of populations in occupied territories the same short cuts may be taken. A letter to *The Times* of February 5, 1940, published under the heading of



"British Humanity in War," quotes an official German historian's defence of British conduct in the South African War:

". . . The behaviour of the British was as chivalrous and humane as that of the Boers always was, so long as they were opposed by the regular Boer forces, which were distinguishable as such. But after the occupation of Bloemfontein the loosely organized and badly disciplined militia forces of the Boers broke up. Those still in the field were often merely irregulars, and no longer recognizable externally as combatants. By degrees they adopted guerilla tactics which, by obliterating the distinction between a really combatant force and a hostile population, were bound naturally to arouse a constantly increasing feeling of bitterness among the British troops, which were often menaced, and this not only explains much of their severity, but also justifies it. If, therefore, the English authorities subsequently adopted on several occasions increasingly severe reprisals, which often made their conduct of the war appear harsh, yet they did so, in the majority of cases, only in accordance with their duty and the justifiable protection of the lives of those under their command."

The same insistence on the principle of communal responsibility for the activities of *francs-tireurs* was invoked by apologists of German treatment of Belgian populations in the war of 1914.<sup>1</sup>

The brutality and cruelty committed by the armed forces form only a small part of the total picture. What looms very much larger is the interest that the public

<sup>1</sup> See article on The Bryce Committee in the *Encyclopedia Americana*.



displays in them. For each soldier who commits a brutal act there are hundreds of civilians on the other side avidly imagining and denouncing it. The peculiar quality of the interest that such people feel in atrocity stories can be explained only in terms of unconscious impulse. Many ordinary people harbour unconsciously, and in a milder form, those same impulses which are so strong in the sadist that he has to act them out. They consequently feel what they can only describe—if they are honest with themselves—as the magnetic quality of atrocity stories; they feel a compelling interest in them, as well as indignation; they find themselves in a state of horrified fascination. This quality of feeling is at its strongest when the atrocities have, as they so often have, an admixture of the obscene or sexual. The conscious effect of the story is to arouse pity, indignation, and disgust. Unconsciously, however, it has brought up the possibility of committing or suffering such an atrocity ourselves. Any submerged sadistic or masochistic impulses which we may harbour are immediately stimulated. It is this which gives our feelings a special quality. We may find that other crimes—for instance, the conviction of Dreyfus by forged evidence—give rise to equally strong or stronger indignation and pity. But many people find that such crimes claim less compulsive attention than a story of torture and brutal flogging. And the view that this is due to some such unconscious fascination seems the most plausible that psychology can offer. It is, of course, the people who are most fascinated whose indignation will be the most intense; the fierceness of their hatred and the



depth of their disgust are their way of making amends to themselves for the fascination they find in the stories.

From a slightly different point of view many atrocity stories can be understood as highlights in accounts of more general persecution. Here too unconscious tendencies come into play to give the stories their strength of appeal. People who, without giving it frank expression, harbour a good deal of self-pity and a sense of grievance will find a satisfaction in resenting the open, tangible persecution of others. Themselves, they have a vague sense of not having been given a fair deal, but there is little positive ill-treatment that they can justifiably protest against. Now, in the alleged persecution of a minority in the enemy's territory—Jew, Arab, Pole, Indian—they find at last a clear example of the helpless person being ill-treated. It provides an outlet for the burning resentment which their own, somehow intangible, raw deal has been storing up in them. Physical atrocities committed on the helpless victims are the clearest, most unequivocal forms of the persecution, and they finally unlock the floodgates of a righteous rage which has for long been welling up from quite other sources.

Not only are the actual brutalities of war exaggerated for purposes of propaganda and rationalization, but many entirely baseless stories are invented. In war they are believed; in peace derided by the same people who believed them. But impartial and scientific investigation of the facts is extraordinarily difficult, and I believe no one can say of any war or persecution just how much of the alleged cruelty occurred and how far it



was gratuitous and unprovoked. Long after the occasion it still remains to someone's advantage to conceal the truth about the accusations and denials that were made. Although the political significance of the facts may wane (and the history of the cadaver story shows how far from completely it disappears), individuals will still be reluctant to admit the falsifications and the exaggerations they were guilty of, even if they were conscious of them at the time and consciously recall them afterwards. The difficulty of discovering accurately even emotionally insignificant facts is very great, and the emotions vested in atrocity stories make the difficulties largely insuperable.

One fact that has to be borne in mind is that in peace-time, when impartial investigation is possible, it is mainly the sceptical inquiries that will be made. Not many people will still be keenly interested to amplify the proof of the atrocities; the defence will be conducted with far more zeal. This tendency appears, for instance, in Lasswell. Although writing as a scientist, his evidence on the atrocity stories of 1914 is far too scanty to justify by scientific standards the derisory attitude he adopts towards them; he writes, in fact, as a propagandist of the typical post-war outlook. Far better evidence is adduced by Ponsonby, although his intention was much more frankly that of making anti-war propaganda. His evidence throws light on some, at least, of the origins of atrocity stories.

He quotes no instance of Government agents taking the risk and responsibility of inventing the stories. The nearest approach to this was the story given out by a



Fleet Paymaster, and repeated by a naval commander, of the commander of a derelict U-boat who, on being picked up by a British patrol boat, tried to leave four British prisoners in the submarine when it was to be blown up. Disinterested agitation against this lie led the Government to state that they regarded the story as without foundation and considered that the Fleet Paymaster, who said he heard it from more than one source, should certainly have tried to verify it.

Invention of atrocity stories by the alleged victims did occur and was sometimes shown up. Ponsonby quotes one case of a girl forging letters which described how her sister, a nurse in Belgium, had had her breasts cut off by the Germans; the story had wide publicity, but the girl was eventually prosecuted. A similar case was that of the tattooed seaman who said that his face had been tattooed with a picture of a cobra by order of a German submarine commander. Photographs of his tattooed face appeared in two British newspapers, the faked tattoo marks being of a full-length snake in one newspaper, and in another, on the same day, of a cobra's head only. A feature of this story, frequently met with in others, was the number of people who were willing to confirm it. "Artifex" of the *Manchester Guardian*, who helped to expose it, wrote (see Ponsonby):

"Not indeed that I ought to complain, in this case, of lack of corroborative evidence. I have been assured that the man, while working in a dockyard on the Tyne, has also (1) undergone skin-grafting in Salford Royal Hospital, (2) gone mad with horror in Leaf Square Hospital, (3) caused by his awful appearance



the premature confinement and death of his young wife at Levenshulme, (4) thrown his delicate twelve-year-old daughter into fits at Stockport, (5) lived for nine months in a house in Weaste without ever coming out except after dark, which is why none of the neighbours have ever seen him, and (6) resided for the whole time at Gorton, Swinton, Pendlebury, and Tyldesley."

This eagerness of the public to believe is the most striking fact about atrocity stories. "Artifex" records how a clergyman was told the story of a British prisoner of war in Germany who, in writing home, told his family (friends of the man who passed on the story) to soak off the stamp on the letter for "little Alf's collection"; under the stamp was the message that the prisoner's tongue had been torn out, and that this was the only way he could let them know.

"The clergyman told the man the story was absurd, and that he ought to be ashamed of himself for repeating it, as everyone knew that prisoners' letters did not bear stamps. If his friend had managed to put a stamp on his letter, it was the best possible way of attracting attention to what he was trying to hide. But the stranger, no doubt from patriotic motives, indignantly refused to have his story spoiled, and it was widely circulated in Manchester."<sup>1</sup>

Eagerness to keep the stories going leads to the manufacture of corroborative evidence by people who would be thought to have no motive whatever for spreading a lie. The story of the Germans crucifying Canadian soldiers (in the American version it was a French girl) was authoritatively denied after it had

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ponsonby.



received tremendous publicity, including two despatches in *The Times* and several questions in the House of Commons. But, says Ponsonby:

"It cropped up again in 1919, when a letter was published by the *Nation* (April 12th) from Private E. Loader, 2nd Royal West Kent Regiment, who declared he had seen the crucified Canadian. The *Nation* was informed in a subsequent letter from Captain E. N. Bennett that there was no such private on the rolls of the Royal West Kents, and that the 2nd Battalion was in India during the whole war."

Ponsonby also quotes a letter published as late as 1927 in a New Zealand newspaper from a man who gave his name:

"My wife, who in 1914-1915 was a nurse in the Ramsgate General Hospital, England, actually nursed Belgian women and children refugees who were the victims of Hun rapacity and fiendishness, the women having had their breasts cut off and the children with their hands hacked off at the wrists."

But when an inquiry was made, the secretary of the Ramsgate General Hospital replied, in a letter quoted by Ponsonby, that "there were no such cases received."

These pieces of fake evidence are of the utmost importance. The atrocity story spreads with immense rapidity and is heard from so many different people that even rather sceptical hearers, impressed only by the bulk of the hearsay, begin to think that there is no smoke without fire. Then some single piece of direct evidence appears, conclusive if it were true, and that is enough to give all the previous hearsay overwhelming



force. A great deal of atrocity propaganda has followed this technique, presenting a large amount of hearsay evidence surrounding one nugget of direct, conclusive eye-witness report. Occasionally it is possible to show, as Ponsonby did in these instances, that the nugget is sham. But one is bound to suspect that for each piece of fake evidence which is exposed there are many that cannot be.

The repetition of substantially the same account from many different sources is a feature of atrocity stories that is likely to be given more weight than it deserves. What has to be remembered here is the extraordinary suggestibility of a social group at a high level of emotional tension, such as the population of an occupied territory. The atmosphere of the group is such that its self-respect goes up and its prestige in the outside world is heightened with each new indignity and cruelty that it can report. In such an atmosphere a great deal of falsehood can be generated with very little—if any—conscious lying. The production of the stories is more comparable to the production of the hysterical syndrome which Charcot used to find in abundance but which, with the decline of his influence in psychological medicine, could rarely be discovered.

In the main the responsibility for atrocity stories rests with the publics who wait so avidly for them. Each public will have its sprinkling of people in whom the craving is so intense that they will turn to active invention and embroidery, and purvey the results among their friends. Such people are probably closely similar, in the psychological mechanisms that activate



them, to those who write lurid and unplausible accounts on public lavatory walls of perverted sexual orgies. These fictions in turn are closely similar to masturbation fantasies. And it seems reasonable, in view of the evidence, to think that the main function of many atrocity stories is to act as stimulating fantasies for the mildly sadistic and masochistic members of the public who devour them.

This characteristic of atrocity stories produces such an embarrassing spate of them, of increasing absurdity, that official agencies grow anxious lest all the stories should be discredited and their propaganda value decline. They therefore repudiate some of the most grotesque. Ponsonby quotes a cablegram from General Pershing which the War Department of the United States published in October 1918:

"A St. Louis (Missouri) paper recently received here states that a sergeant, one of fifty men sent back in connection with the Liberty Loan campaign, is making speeches in which he states: 'The Germans give poisoned candy to the children to eat and hand-grenades for them to play with. They show glee at the children's dying writhings and laugh aloud when the grenades explode. I saw one American boy, about seventeen years old, who had been captured by the Germans, come back to our trenches. He had cotton in and about his ears. I asked someone what the cotton was for.

"The Germans cut off his ears and sent him back to tell us they want to fight men," was the answer. "They feed Americans on tuberculosis germs."

"As there is no foundation whatever in fact for such statements, based on any experience we have had, I



recommend that this sergeant, if the statements quoted above were made by him, be immediately returned for duty and that the statements be contradicted.

PERSHING."

But to offset this the Governments do what they can to give authenticity and respectability to a certain range of stories. The Bryce Committee, officially sponsored in the war of 1914, consisted of eminent historians, lawyers, and men of affairs who investigated the atrocities said to have been committed on Belgians. The evidence in their report was most impressive and provided valuable propaganda. It included convincing evidence of, among other atrocities, the chopping off of Belgian children's hands. Ponsonby quotes from the memoirs of Signor Nitti, the Italian Prime Minister, the assertion that the atrocity stories were "inventions to arouse the fighting spirit of our people." Signor Nitti continues:

"We heard the story of poor little Belgian children whose hands were cut off by the Huns. After the war a rich American, who was deeply touched by the French propaganda, sent an emissary to Belgium with the intention of providing a livelihood for the children whose poor little hands had been cut off. He was unable to discover one. Mr. Lloyd George and myself, when at the head of the Italian government, carried on extensive investigations as to the truth of these horrible accusations, some of which, at least, were told specifically as to names and places. Every case investigated proved to be a myth."

From Colonel Repington's *Diary of the World War* Ponsonby quotes the following:



"I was told by Cardinal Gasquet that the Pope promised to make a great protest to the world if a single case could be proved of the violation of Belgian nuns or cutting off of children's hands. An inquiry was instituted and many cases examined with the help of the Belgian Cardinal Mercier. Not one case could be proved."

What is quite certain is that the atrocity stories will always be plausible in the circumstances in which they live and flourish. An unpalatable atrocity story would not spread. From one war to another, therefore, the stories in circulation will change a good deal, according to changes in the public taste. In this country the popular Sunday newspapers with enormous sales probably give a very good indication of what atrocity stories will be current. The war of 1914 produced an atmosphere of sex and atrocity which was like an intensified version of the humbler reading for a Sunday morning in peace-time. Since then the Sunday newspapers have grown less lurid, and this would suggest less lurid stories as the staple of atrocity propaganda in the war of 1939.

Once more it is necessary to repeat that the truth about atrocities is exceptionally hard to come by and will not be reached by automatically disbelieving every atrocity story. The apologists of the German treatment of the Belgians admitted the shooting of civilians chosen at random, as a reprisal for *franc-tireur* activity, justifying it on the principle of communal responsibility. When every belligerent is ready to take the brutal short cut in its official military policy it is likely that some



individuals will go much farther—perhaps under provocation, perhaps from actual sadism—and give grounds for an atrocity story.

Moreover, there may be cases where no brutal *intention* can be shown, and yet callousness did occur. It has been suggested, for instance, that some stories of German brutality to hospital patients may have arisen because German doctors used anaesthetics far less—for German patients too—than British and American doctors did.<sup>1</sup> But in war-time, of course, such treatment is immediately assumed to show sadistic pleasure in inflicting pain on an enemy.

The crucial question is always whether political purposes demand that the public's craving for such material shall be stimulated and fed. The best-authenticated—and some of the most lurid—atrocity stories are provided by the lynchings which still occur each year in the south of the United States of America.<sup>2</sup> If reported at all in the English Press, they receive only the barest mention. But imagine the use that could be made of them if, for reasons of state, British indignation had to be stirred up against the United States.

The only line that psychology can legitimately take on this question is to emphasize the need for scepticism. Even the informed and intelligent member of the public is far from realizing the intense degree of scepticism which is justified towards mouth-to-mouth stories, however certain we may feel of the honest intentions of the purveyor. The amazing distortions that occur

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Dr. May Smith for this information.

<sup>2</sup> For a blood-curdling account of them, see Pryns Hopkins.



when stories are repeated, even unemotional stories and even in peace-time, have been shown experimentally by Bartlett [1932]. With atrocity stories in war-time the situation is worse for several reasons. In the first place the public is notoriously more suggestible in war-time. In the second place atrocity stories have for many people a strong fascination; to disbelieve them is to deny the occurrence of something which interests the hearer intensely even while it horrifies him. Thirdly, positive disproof of such stories is practically impossible under conditions of war. And this last is a very serious difficulty. For many people would be willing definitely to disbelieve the stories if evidence could be brought against them. But very few people can continue for long to suspend their judgment on a question that has great emotional significance whichever way it is answered.



## CHAPTER X

# Sexual Interests in War-time

THE relaxation that occurred in the code of sexual ethics was a striking feature of life in Britain during the war of 1914.<sup>1</sup> It was accompanied by two misfortunes not inherently part of it—great increases in the incidence of syphilis and of illegitimate births. We may assume that these accompaniments would be much less prominent in another war. The more interesting psychological question is whether the sexual licence itself is an inevitable feature of war.

Before taking the war of 1914 as a pattern from which to predict public morality in other wars, we ought to examine the circumstances at that time more carefully. The question is whether the looseness of sexual behaviour came about as a result of the war or whether the war only hastened, and made more open, a process that had already begun. For men the effective sexual code of the Edwardian period was not very strict. For women the Edwardian period was one of revolt against restrictions and taboos of many kinds, among them restrictions on women's employment, which

<sup>1</sup> For a shocked account of it, see the early chapters of Huntly Carter, *The New Spirit in the European Theatre, 1914-1924*.



worked to reinforce the sexual taboos. An acceleration of the change among women and a more open expression of the masculine code, the latter encouraged by the changing outlook among women, may have been the real effects of the war of 1914. Dame Ethel Smyth records the significant fact that when Mrs. Pankhurst, the most notable of the feminist reformers, patriotically shelved the women's suffrage campaign, she turned her attention to founding a home for the illegitimate babies which war-time conditions were producing. It seems certain that the effect of war in this respect must depend on the nature of the sexual conventions when war breaks out and on the trends already present.

Yet there are some reasons for expecting that war will encourage more sexual licence than we are used to in time of peace. Soldiers on active service are, for one thing, faced with the same difficulties as seamen meet with in establishing satisfactory sexual habits for themselves. Long periods in exclusively masculine company alternating with short spells in port or on leave obviously invite a different set of conventions from those established in civilian life. Lengthy courtships or wooings are impracticable. Sexual demands are likely to be more direct than in civil life, where everyday social contacts with women not only give mild satisfactions, but also tend to produce inurement or lessened susceptibility.

Several reasons combine to make it likely that men on leave will be in a heightened state of sexual desire. First, the local physical appetite—the desire for detur-



gescence—will have been starved for some time, except perhaps for masturbation or homosexual practices. But, secondly, this means more than a physical deprivation, for the local sexual act is also a means of general psychological release, a discharge of tension and a relief from strain. The dammed-up desire for this act of general release is much more important than the local appetite, and may be unusually strong in men who are in a state of protest at the hardships and strains of active service. An anonymous, discontented recruit of the British peace-time army describes a gruelling day's journey through the North of England in a tank that developed engine trouble, matters being made worse by a bullying sergeant. At the end of the day they camped uncomfortably in a field and went to bed—

“that is, we rolled ourselves in blankets and lay on the ground. I was just getting off to sleep when one of the fellows from another tank came over and shook me excitedly. ‘Come on, there’s some girls in the corner of the field!’ he said.

“‘Girls! Ye Gods!’ As one man we rushed across the field to where the girls were said to be.” (Private XYZ, “I Joined the Army,” *Fact*, May 1937.)

Such an episode gives a clue to one aspect of war-time sexuality.

Here too another fact bearing on war-time sex ethics may be mentioned. If there is any class difference in this matter it consists in a rather greater licence among some sections of the poorest classes as compared with the lower middle class. Ordinarily their behaviour does



not serve as an example to those slightly above them in economic status; it is not much seen, and when it is seen its social place disqualifies it from being imitated. In the army there is to some extent a levelling up of the lowest classes; as privates they are equal in status to many lower middle-class men. Their conduct is more obtrusive; it is less easily dismissed as a social stigma; and it often represents a more natural response to conditions of hardship and strain than do the sexual conventions of men brought up in greater physical comfort and amidst a greater concern for gentleness.

Except in the simplest forms of prostitution the social aspect of sexual relationships is at least as important as the local physical appetite. It may be more important, and the gratifications it offers to different men and at different times are very varied. To mention the more obvious, there may be a sense of receiving consolation from a member of the mother's sex; there may be a partnership in hectic determination to achieve carefree excitement; there may be a conspiratorial sense of naughtiness, of defying taboos; there may be a sense of triumph for those men who have compulsively to prove and re-prove that, after all, every woman can be conquered. These, fortunately, are only a few of the social attitudes in which the sexual act is set. What is important is that many such attitudes are the outcome of psychological difficulties and pressures. Increase the general strain that a man is exposed to, and he has a narrower margin of resilience for handling his own particular psychological difficulties. In so far, then, as those difficulties find relief in a personal relationship



associated with sex, he will have a further pressure towards sexual activities when they are available. He will find, in one or more aspects of sex, a momentary but very complete escape from psychological strain.

It would be a mistake to assert that sexual activity has these functions for every man, but it has them commonly enough to go some way towards accounting for the sex phenomena of war-time.

But even a complete explanation of *men's* attitude to sex in war-time would not be enough. Why is it that women become more accessible? The reasons here too must be various and complex. By many women sexual acquiescence is regarded largely as a way of getting something else—whether simply money and clothes, or theatres and dances and dinners, or just adoring attention. Since war makes men's demand more insistent, the exchange value of acquiescence is increased in one direction and reduced in another. For, to put it crudely, the price is high for an immediate sale, but prolonged adoration and service are abnormally difficult to obtain. Moreover, since laxer sexual behaviour is general, social disapproval of easy acquiescence is somewhat weakened and the penalties are less severe.

But, although very widespread in our culture, an attitude of barter towards sexual attraction is not the only possibility for women. For them too sexual activity may give, not only a direct physical satisfaction, but also the more complex satisfactions that derive from some significance found in the personal relationship and its social implications. And war may heighten these as well. For example, if a woman thinks of herself as



bestowing a favour, the self-sacrifice and the perilous position of the soldier make him an unusually deserving object of indulgence. Marvell's argument:

"Had we but World enough, and Time,  
This coyness Lady were no crime . . .  
But at my back I alwaies hear  
Times winged Chariot hurrying near:  
And yonder all before us lye  
Desarts of vast Eternity"

has special force in time of war, whether the woman thinks of the pleasure mainly as bestowed or as taken.

For other women a contributory factor in increased sexual interest is the intensification of male qualities in the serving soldier, who is now not only a man but a particularly masculine man: strong, with powerful weapons, enduring hardship, facing danger, and very obviously the defender of the women of his social group. Further, he lives with other soldiers, managing without women. All this makes him a challenge. Some women reply by doing men's work themselves; others by feeling a stronger wish to interest a soldier in them. He is the sort of man whom the growing girl has *not* seen filling an assigned place in a family run largely by women; he is therefore not so confidently understood and not so unquestionably manageable. These things are only dimly perceived, and they result simply in the feeling that soldiers are rather thrilling, more exciting than ordinary boys, and in a slightly greater eagerness on the part of the girl to prove to herself and other girls that she can secure and manage one.

Again, for girls in late adolescence (among whom in



the war of 1914 there was a marked relaxation of the sexual code) the sense of defiantly exploring the exciting possibilities which the parental generation tries to deny them may be a far greater satisfaction than their physical enjoyments. Whenever the attitude to sex becomes "hectic" one may suspect that a guilty pleasure in merely defying taboos is prominent in the total state of mind. The simpler sexual interests, uncomplicated by the more absurd taboos, are manageable and moderate.

In sum, then, the explanation of war-time sexuality is not simple, because peace-time sexuality is not simple. In particular, it is not the same one appetite which surges up in everyone; its emotional setting and its implications for the rest of the personality are endlessly different. Some people imagine sexual interests as a naturally volcanic uprush only perilously held in check by stringent taboos, repressions, sublimations, and what not. With the coming of war, they think, the taboos are removed and the natural disaster overwhelms society. The doctrines of psychology and psycho-analysis have not effectively discountenanced this point of view, often indeed have encouraged it. But it may well be argued that these current doctrines are a legacy of Victorianism (and of the Christian attitude in many ages), which achieved the double feat of not only sitting on the safety-valve of sex but of assiduously stoking the fires. The heat and pressure that have been generated are real enough, and nothing in psycho-analytic doctrine has exaggerated them; but they are much more a cultural artifact than many psychologists seem to



believe. Whereas some theorists suggest that our cultural achievements depend on "sublimating" the tremendous pressure of sex, it is arguable that the tremendous pressure of sex is itself one of our most curious cultural achievements.

From this point of view it is clear that sexual behaviour in any particular war will depend very much on the state of the public mind when war comes. Some increase in sexual desire is probably to be expected in any severe and prolonged war. If this were all, the outcome might be very slight: a small increase in prostitution and promiscuity, shorter engagements, and more rash marriages. These things could happen without any sweeping change in the sexual standards of the public as a whole. But if people have for some time been complicating the meaning that sex holds for them and concentrating more and more significance on the act of defying the current taboos, then the coming of war will have a much more sweeping effect. Encouraged to concentrate all their effort on the main issue of winning the war, allowed to think other aspects of conduct *relatively* insignificant, the public relaxes its precarious hold over impulses that were already getting out of hand.

The number of people who in war-time disregard checks on sexual intercourse itself may be large or small. But in any case it will be small in comparison with the outer fringe who change only in giving their imagination freer rein. This will be vastly greater, including among others a large number of loudly protesting prudes. A tremendous increase in salaciousness—



and avid denunciation of it—marked the entertainment world in the war of 1914,<sup>1</sup> and there was eager expectation that the same thing would happen in 1939.

In 1939 the prevailing attitude to sex was certainly less terrified and more balanced than in 1914, and presaged a less violent change in sexual manners as a result of war. Even so there was sufficient confusion of feeling to ensure that some relaxation of taboos would come as a relief. A film weekly, for example, in the same issue as it inquired anxiously whether war might lower morals in films as in other entertainments, published a "still" showing a girl lying on her back in a sylvan setting with her lover sitting or kneeling beside her. It was innocent in the extreme, but the caption ran:

"HORIZONTAL LOVE SCENES ARE BACK

"Horizontal love scenes, for long frowned upon by the Hays Office, are back judging by this shot of Ellen Drew and Robert Paige. . . . Ellen will be getting a reputation for being naughty on the screen if she doesn't watch out. In her last picture she played the not-so-demure Diana in *French Without Tears*. . . ."

(*Picturegoer*, December 2, 1939.)

The Hays Office list of prohibited topics and treatments, and such reactions to it as the above, speak of minds amazingly sensitized to sexuality and yet submitting to, or demanding, the most anxious prohibitions. And, moreover, these prohibitions are strangely arbitrary. On the opposite page to the horizontal love scene the same film magazine had the following:

<sup>1</sup> See Huntly Carter and Viscount Sandhurst. The latter was Lord Chamberlain at the time.



"For years the movie moguls have been trying to find a definition of Sex Appeal.

"Now the members of the Psychology Club of the University of Southern California have decided to go about the thing scientifically.

"They analysed the claims of a hundred feminine celebrities according to the standards of Sigmund Freud's conception of the perfect libido and they chose Zorina as the girl possessing 'those factors which bring about the fullest appeal' judged by that test."

Above this there appeared a photograph of the ballet dancer (vertical). This condition of hyper-sensitivity combined with arbitrary prohibitions means that many of the public are in the state of a dog who hungrily watches a biscuit that is not yet "paid for." Let there be a serious dislocation of ordinary routine, such as war brings, and they quickly abandon the unnatural performance.

With the necessary conditions of prudery and confused feeling so clearly present, it was not surprising that changes in the standard of entertainment occurred quite soon after war began in 1939. How real and deep the demand for salaciousness then was cannot be known at present. To some extent the very widespread expectation that it would be provided and the immediate experiments of the entertainment world in that direction *may* have been an example of the mechanical reinstatement of habits established in the previous war. But in the main this tendency is a natural outcome of the confused attitudes already commented on.

This indeed is the point to be emphasized: excited promiscuity, pornography, and salaciousness are not



to be blamed on war but on the preceding peace. If the public can feel genuinely excited at trifling jokes about the genitalia, the sexual act, and the processes of excretion, this only reflects on the curious state of mind that had been cultivated before the jokes were released. In a letter to the *News Review* (January 15, 1940) a Manchester woman sums up the position with unwitting neatness:

"The jokes on the wireless are getting filthier—they make me blush before my children. Sir John Reith would never have stood for them."

We cannot understand war-time sexuality without asking how it is that in peace-time such anxious prohibitions are imposed by the very large section of public opinion that Sir John Reith and the blushing mother represented.

We have to conclude that it is only in a slight degree that war necessarily tends to bring looser sexual conduct. What it mainly does is to reveal peace-time confusions of attitude rather more sharply. It does this through redirecting the censorious efforts of the group: so much attention is given to denouncing the enemy, smelling out shirkers, urging on the Government, and reviling pacifists that sexual lapses have to take a second place. Now the standards of sexual conduct in peace-time are still achieved largely by one of two processes: either by keeping the individual's sexual interests to a great extent repressed and unconscious, or by imposing social penalties for any outward expression of them. It is still not free choice between



conscious desires that decides most people's sexual behaviour. Hence it follows that any deflection of censorious effort will mean the more open expression of the submerged interests. All that war does is to show up the precariousness of sexual standards in peace-time.

To guard against a possible misunderstanding it should be added that this view does not imply that the peace-time sexual standards are mistaken. They may be, but that is not the question here. What is suggested is that the means by which the standards are achieved—largely threats and repression instead of free conscious choice—are perhaps unwise because, as war-time changes show, the results are precarious.



## CHAPTER XI

# Protest and Collapse

HOWEVER blind may be the acquiescence of millions of people in the declaration of war, not very long can elapse before they are compelled to learn something about it in its "minute particulars." When wars end there is evidence of intense weariness and overpowering repugnance on both sides, victor and vanquished alike. The collapse of nations is easy to understand; the striking fact of the war of 1914 was the length of time they endured the strain without collapsing. To what is this long toleration of war to be attributed, and how does it eventually break down?

Two factors making for collapse have to be distinguished. First, there is the physical and psychological strain which would be set up by any prolonged undertaking of an arduous and dangerous kind; exploration, migration, pioneering all bring strain of this kind. And secondly, there is psychological conflict and revolt against the idea of war itself. These two factors enhance one another, but the process of collapse can best be understood by considering them separately. Tolerance

The first is the more readily understood. Tolerance



of this direct strain will depend on such things as the nation's physical nourishment, the efficient direction of its labour so as to eliminate avoidable fatigue, the proper training of workers, the effectiveness of the recreation provided for them, their belief in ultimate victory, their religious or other consolation for personal bereavements, their faith in the national leaders. All these things are of recognized importance in armies, and their significance for the non-combatant populations is nowadays seen to be equally great. The fact that it is war, and not some other undertaking, that calls for the national effort complicates the situation. But, even so, there is much in common between the effort of a nation at war and the effort of, say, an Everest expedition; the same influences will be making for success or failure.

Nor are these influences exclusively conscious. The most dramatic evidence of the unconscious factors appears in the psycho-neuroses of war. In a general discussion of war the significance of war neuroses lies in there being no sharp difference between these states and the final collapse of the rest of the warring populations. Large-scale modern wars are not usually ended because the armies on one side have been annihilated or made prisoner; when a Great Power collapses it will still have hundreds of thousands of well-equipped troops in the field. It is this which chagrins defeated generals.

"Ludendorff devotes a great many pages to explaining just how it was that he did not lose the War, and how the Alien and Radical riff-raff in the population



collapsed behind the lines, leaving a sort of vacuum, in which the German troops fell, victorious to the end." (Lasswell [1927].)

It may be that General Gamelin will plausibly write to the same effect of the French collapse in 1940.<sup>1</sup> Military reverses certainly play a larger part than defeated generals admit, but it remains true that the collapse of a Great Power generally implies that the civilian population equally with the army has been defeated. Nations are defeated when they reach their limit, either the limit of endurance of physical and psychological hardship, or the limit of their belief in the possibility and importance of victory.

The psycho-neurotic reach their limit earlier. In the absence of general agreement among their social group that collapse is inevitable, their collapse has to take the form of symptoms which are beyond their conscious control and responsibility. In one way or another the total organism of body and mind abandons the attempt to remain an integrated whole and to meet the full complexity of the physical and social situation in which it finds itself. But the national collapse at the end of the war relieves this intolerable strain by simplifying the social situation and no longer demanding that everyone shall go on holding out if he wants to remain an acceptable member of his group.

Too much stress was laid, in the earlier reports on the war neuroses, upon the fact that the symptom ensured escape from the danger zone. It had then to be carefully explained that the production of the

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Alexander Werth, *The Last Days of Paris*.



neurosis involved little if any element of malingering.<sup>1</sup> It is now more usual to speak of the escape secured by the symptom as merely its "secondary advantage" and not a basic explanation of its occurrence. The collapse was essentially an *aimless*, uncalculated response to intolerable strain; the unconscious aim of escaping from the front line was perhaps effective in deciding on the particular form the symptom would take, but no more. That there should have been this secondary advantage was of course inevitable. A wound that brought honourable escape could not fail to be welcomed with relief. Sassoon well describes his state of inebriation when a daring bombing raid brought him not only kudos but a wound that ensured his return to England:

"... I would like to be able to remember that I smiled grimly and departed reticently. But the 'bombing show' had increased my self-importance, and my exodus from the Front Line was a garrulous one. A German bullet had passed through me leaving a neat hole near my right shoulder-blade and this patriotic perforation had made a different man of me. I now looked at the War, which had been a monstrous tyrant, with liberated eyes. For the time being I had regained the right to call myself a private individual."

If we are tempted to lay much stress on the secondary advantages of the neurotic symptom, we should consider the tremendous price ultimately paid in the misery of the paralysis, blindness, or other symptom. There are equally good grounds for arguing that the

<sup>1</sup> See C. S. Myers, *Shell Shock in France, 1914-1918*.



severity of the symptom is an unconscious expiation of the secondary advantage which it secured.

The main thing to be stressed about the psychoneuroses of war is that they are in effect a protest against unbearable strain. The protest takes the unintelligible form of a symptom because the barriers against avowed protest—dereliction of duty, admitted terror, suicide, revolt—are as strong as the impulse to protest. In mental life when an irresistible force meets an immovable obstacle the result is a neurotic symptom, or its equivalent in an addiction to alcohol or narcotics (addictions which increased extensively in the war of 1914). That the public's faith in buttressing the immovable obstacles is still as strong as ever may be judged from a passage in the anthology for soldiers prepared by James Agate in 1939:

"If I had the ordering of a soldier's last day of final leave, I should avoid, above all things, the Imperial War Museum. I should insist on Westminster Abbey in the morning, a cricket or football match in the afternoon, and a Crazy Show at the Palladium in the evening." (Quoted in the *Sunday Times*, December 10, 1939.)

One is tempted to feel that W. H. R. Rivers might as well not have lived when this attitude can not only be expressed but quoted with approval in a newspaper catering for the more literate sections of the public. But faith in repression dies hard, because for the majority of people it is a serviceable device for a very long while. The great mistake—which Rivers more than anyone exposed—is to recommend conscious



attempts at inducing repression to those whose repressive devices are failing. It may be true that in the country of the blind the one-eyed will be happier blindfold, but the blindfolding is difficult to achieve.

How long different people will endure the discomfort and pain and danger of warfare will depend not only on such factors as health and training, but also on unconscious tendencies established in the past. Tolerant of contemporary danger will partly depend on how well the individual has come to terms with the earliest dangers and threats (real or imaginary) that assailed him. The man in whom the anxiety set up by early dangers has never been allayed finds worse terror in the contemporary danger than the man who habitually has the sense of a wider margin of safety between himself and calamity. Men who have got past the anxieties of infancy only by canalizing them into a specific phobia, or by taking an obsessional grip on themselves, present special problems to the psychotherapist and may keep out of his hands for a long while. This, however, brings us to the detailed problems of psycho-pathology which are not within the range of this book.<sup>1</sup>

But in its general outline, as I have suggested, the topic of war neuroses is highly relevant to any discussion of war, since it presents in telescoped and dramatized form the psychological collapse with which modern wars are likely to end. And the more the civilian

<sup>1</sup> For a brief survey of the conflicting and inadequate evidence at present available on the war neuroses, see Wittkower and Spillane.



population is exposed to the violence of warfare the more relevant it will become.

So far only the strain that any dangerous and arduous undertaking might produce has been discussed. This is an artificial isolation. For in reality many people find a constant and cumulative strain in dimly realizing that their nation has entered into an understanding with the enemy to inflict these miseries on each other in order to settle a political dispute. As the physical and psychological hardships mount up, so the conflicting whisper grows: "Is the war worth while?" The question is not "Can I hold out?" but "Was there any point in starting?"

With the swing of the pendulum that comes in the post-war years, disgust at the whole idea of the conflict is predominant. One asks how this growing repugnance, the expression of which in peace becomes not only permissible but acclaimed, was dealt with in the years of war. It was Trotter, writing in the early years of the war of 1914, who identified and named the most important process by which the psychological conflict is kept out of sight. It operates among that large proportion of the public whose mental comfort depends on their sense of solidarity with the social group as a corporate body. As long as the dominant opinion of the nation holds that war is necessary, these people will be, as Trotter terms it, "resistive" to anything which would force them to disagree—resistive not only to unorthodox opinions but even to their own experience if it might lead them towards an unorthodox opinion themselves. Some are resistive to disturbing facts out



of sheer indifference, lack of sensitiveness; others achieve resistiveness through rationalization.

"The solutions [of conflict] by indifference or by rationalization [says Trotter], or by a mixture of these two processes, are characteristic of the great class of normal, sensible, reliable middle-age, with its definite views, its resiliency to the depressing influence of facts, and its gift for forming the backbone of the State. In them herd suggestion shows its capacity to triumph over experience, to delay the evolution of altruism, and to obscure the existence and falsify the results of the contest between personal and social desires. That it is able to do so has the advantage of establishing the existing society with great firmness, but it has also the consequence of entrusting the conduct of the State and the attitude of it towards life to a class which their very stability shows to possess a certain relative incapacity to take experience seriously, a certain relative insensibility to the value of feeling and to suffering and a decided preference for herd tradition over all other sources of conduct. . . . This mental stability, then, is to be regarded as, in certain important directions, a loss; and the nature of the loss resides in a limitation of outlook, a relative intolerance of the new in thought, and a consequent narrowing of the range of facts over which satisfactory intellectual activity is possible. We may, therefore, for convenience, refer to this type as the resistive. . . ."

Some of Trotter's conceptions are no longer current, but this idea of resistance,<sup>1</sup> or incapacity to take

<sup>1</sup> The resistance which occurs in psycho-analytic treatment, in which the patient erects unconscious barriers against becoming aware of painful repressed material, is a special form of the more general process which Trotter named.



experience seriously, is still illuminating and valuable. In time of war many social devices testify to resistance and at the same time reinforce it. Full civilian distress at the suffering and injuries and brutalization of people at war (whether our own nationals or the enemy) would be incompatible with the zestful prosecution of the war. The unpleasant facts cannot be altogether ignored (though they are to a great extent hidden), but they no longer possess the full force they would have had in civilian life. Attention is deflected from them on to other aspects of the situation, especially on to the skill, heroism, loyalty, and endurance which are usually entangled inextricably with them:

"In the outpost area the troops have had a stern and bitter time, but they have learnt through suffering. A sergeant of the Royal Welch Fusiliers remarked the other day that the 'babies' who went out to man the outposts returned as grown men." (*The Times*, February 5, 1940.)

Various devices and social conventions help forward the process. The terminology of sport may be used, as when the shooting down of an enemy airman in flames is called "R.A.F.'s First Kill"; here the use of the word "kill" in a sporting sense paradoxically serves to obscure for the reader the fact that somebody really was killed. The same device appears in the following paragraph from the *Observer* of December 10, 1939:

"GOOD 'RATTING'

"German trust in the deterrent power of her baser implements of warfare—the submarine assassin and the loose mine—must be wavering wherever the facts are



known in that country. Our forces by sea and air set about them with the zest of a terrier among rats. Three U-boats sunk in twenty-four hours is a 'pace that kills.' Two of the three were accounted for by aeroplanes, and the censorship makes a welcome and wise departure in letting the graphic story of such exploits reach the nation that is served by them."

Emphasis on the "good show" put up by men in war-time is the keynote of such announcements as "A spirited battle occurred between a Heinkel and two British aircraft" (B.B.C. News Bulletin, 8 a.m., February 4, 1940). The whole system of military decorations has the same effect.

While the social and military customs and the conventions of journalism deal with the everyday items of news in this way, there will always be more elegant and lyrical expressions of the same theme, such as this by Basil de Selincourt in reviewing Herbert Read's anthology for soldiers:

"When he instances the Black Prince, in the manner of his entertainment of the defeated French king after the battle of Poitiers, our thoughts fly to a tale of yesterday, to the fête given by his captors to a daring German aviator. Oh, to make beauty of necessity even when necessity is war!—that is what it is to be human, to be man; and we have men that can do it. The traditional virtue in cheerfulness, the bearing and forbearing tolerance, the glory of chivalry in its blending of courage and compassion, are with us still, and this is a book that assumes and feeds them." (*The Observer*, December 10, 1939.)

It is no wonder that, after some years spent in resolutely turning their minds away from the misery



and filth in which wars actually go on, quite conventionally minded people in the years of peace express the strongest abhorrence for what has been happening. They are by then freed from the dilemma in which war fixes them, and the disowned side of their confused experience can be allowed to emerge.

But the dilemma in which they find themselves in war-time is real; it would be a serious psychological mistake to think of such people as simple turncoats, either cowardly or irresponsible. We may have more respect—in peace-time I think we do—for people who are unable or unwilling to perform the sleight of mind which leaves them comfortable in spite of the dilemma. These are the non-resistive people, who take their experience seriously and fail to rationalize. Yet they cannot thereby release themselves from the dilemma of war. Revulsion from the concrete details of war does not invalidate the ideals which first made the war seem worth entering on. Nor is the individual, because of his bitter revulsion, in any better position to grasp the hidden complications of his State's policy. The simple discreditable aims that he attributes to his State in his mood of bitterness will be just as great an oversimplification as the simple worthy aims which led him first to acquiesce in the war. Sassoon implies this in the detachment with which he describes his state of mind after a discussion with a critic of British war policy in 1914-18:

"As I walked away from Markington my mind was clamorous with confused ideas and phrases. It seemed as if, until to-day, I had been viewing the War through



the loop-hole in a trench parapet. Now I felt so much 'in the know' that I wanted to stop strangers in the street and ask them whether they realized that we ought to state our War Aims. People ought to be warned that there was (as I would have expressed it) some dirty work going on behind their backs. I remembered how sceptical old Lord Asterisk had been about the redemption of 'gallant little Belgium' by the Allies. And now Markington had gloomily informed me that our Aims were essentially acquisitive, what we were fighting for was the Mesopotamian Oil Wells. A jolly fine swindle it would have been for me, if I'd been killed in April for an Oil Well!"

The inherent psychological difficulties in making an individual protest against a war which is actually being waged by one's State have been demonstrated by Sassoon as clearly as they could ever be. His account of his experience in the war of 1914 is unusually valuable because of the way it is written. Not only is it free from any attempt to argue a case, but it is also practically free from the attempt to create an impression or live up to a preconceived *persona*; Sassoon expresses himself without the anxiety and distortion which come from having an over-definite idea of the self which one wants to present. His unanxious, undramatized, and unpsychologized record has very great psychological value, and a brief examination of it is the most illuminating way of showing the dilemma of the individual person in a war between States.

Sherston<sup>1</sup> joined up in July 1914, believing that

<sup>1</sup> In quoting from Sassoon's memoirs I use the faint veiling of names that he has adopted.



"... the War was inevitable and justifiable" and regarding it as his unquestionable duty to enlist. "In fact," he says, "I made quite an impressive inward emotional experience out of it." Much later, after a great deal more experience, he still retained something of this feeling. "My attitude (which had not always been easy to sustain) was that I wanted the War to be an impressive experience—terrible, but not horrible enough to interfere with my heroic emotions." This attitude to the war, although submerged for most of the time, evidently persisted in some form for the greater part of the war. But it took on a more mature form as time went on. On most of the occasions when he describes it Sherston is self-mocking and ironic. On sick leave, for instance, talking to two older men:

"I admitted that it was pretty bad out there, with an inward feeling that such horrors as I had been obliged to witness were now something to be proud of. I even went so far as to assert that I wouldn't have missed this War for anything. It brought things home to one somehow, I remarked, frowning portentously as I lit my pipe, and forgetting for the moment what a mercy it had been when it brought me home myself. . . . Replying to their tributary questions, I felt that they envied me my experience.

"While I was on my way home, I felt elated at having outgrown the parish boundaries of Butley. After all, it was a big thing, to have been in the thick of a European War, and my peace-time existence had been idle and purposeless. It was bad luck on Protheroe and the doctor; they must hate being left out of it . . . I suppose one must give this damned War its due, I thought. . . ."



And more seriously when he was convalescent at a house in the country:

"But Arras and the Somme were a long way off; I couldn't walk there and didn't want to; but they beckoned me with their bombardments and the reality of the men who endured them. I wanted to be there again for a few hours, because the trenches really were more interesting than Lady Asterisk's rose-garden. Seen from a distance, the War had a sombre and unforgettable fascination for its bondsmen. I would have liked to go and see what was happening and perhaps take part in some exciting little exploit. I couldn't gainsay certain intense emotional experiences which I'd lived through in France."

Most profoundly it appeared when, disillusioned with the war, he met a number of conscientious objectors and pacifists. In spite of agreeing with their views, he found a gulf between himself and them:

"In their eyes, I suppose, there was no credit attached to the fact of having been at the front, but for me it had been a supremely important experience. I am obliged to admit that if these anti-war enthusiasts hadn't happened to be likeable I might have secretly despised them. Any man who had been on active service had an unfair advantage over those who hadn't. And the man who had really endured the War at its worst was everlastingly differentiated from everyone except his fellow soldiers."

This attitude, the more mature version of what he felt in enlisting, was a very small part of his total state of mind. For the minute particulars of a European War began to have their effect early on. The death of



his friends looms large among the psychological sufferings. At one point it had the effect of making him really want to kill someone. "It was a phase in my War experience—no more irrational than the rest of the proceedings, I suppose . . ." But in the main his state of mind became one of a sort of numb bewilderment, and his own death seemed the most appropriate thing he could anticipate:

"As for me, I had more or less made up my mind to die; the idea made things easier. In the circumstances there didn't seem to be anything else to be done."

Bewilderment, indeed, was the keynote of much of Sherston's experience:

". . . my thoughts were powerless against unhappiness so huge. I couldn't alter European history, or order the artillery to stop firing. I could stare at the War as I stared at the sky, longing for life and freedom and vaguely altruistic about my fellow-victims. But a second-lieutenant could attempt nothing—except to satisfy his superior officers; and altogether, I concluded, Armageddon was too immense for my solitary understanding."

One aspect of the bewilderment was a gradual loss of his conviction that the war was "inevitable and justifiable." At first the doubts were weak. Writing of a good day's hunting towards the end of a period of sick leave, he says:

"Staring at the dim brown landscape I decided that the War was worth while if it was being carried on to



safeguard this sort of thing. Was it? I wondered; and if a doubt arose it was dismissed before it had been formulated."

On his return to France the doubts deepened.

"I thought of the lengthening spring twilights and the lovely wakening of the year, forgetful of the 'Spring Offensive.' But it was only for a short while, and the bitter reality returned to me as I squeezed myself through the hospital's barbed wire fence. I was losing my belief in the War, and I longed for mental acquiescence—to be like young Patterson, who had come out to fight for his country undoubting, who could still kneel by his bed and say his simple prayers, steadfastly believing that he was in the Field Artillery to make the world a better place. I had believed like that, once upon a time, but now the only prayer which seemed worth uttering was Omar Khayyám's:

*'For all the Sin wherewith the face of Man  
Is blackened—Man's forgiveness give—and take.'*"

This state of mind is of the utmost importance for an understanding of the collapse of a warring nation. It will naturally appear in less sophisticated and cultured forms than Sassoon gives it, but in its main features it is bound in the end to grow very widespread. As people gradually realize the physical and still more the social calamity that has befallen them, the ideals for which they went to war no longer stay in gear with the bloodshed and misery which they were supposed to necessitate. The ideals are not lost; nor is it that the sacrifice would seem too great for those ideals if they really demanded it; what does grow feeble is the conviction that the prolonged mutual killing effectively



serves the ideals. So it comes about that soldier and civilian alike are ready to listen to the other simplified view of war between States—that it serves nothing but material vested interests.

At this point in his war-time development Sherston records another very significant tendency. He became increasingly aware of the soldiers as set apart from the rest of the nation, and his growing bitterness was directed against civilians and politicians. It is one of the paradoxes of war-time psychology that this tendency, unfortunate from the point of view of national endurance, is encouraged by a phenomenon which greatly increases the efficiency of the army itself—namely, the close unity that develops amongst the troops. "Watching the men as they plodded patiently on under their packs, I felt as if my own identity was becoming merged in the Battalion." Feeling some emotional satisfaction at the prospect of a coming offensive, he puzzled over its nature:

"Well, whatever it was, it was some compensation for the loss of last year's day-dreams about England (which I could no longer indulge in, owing to an indefinite hostility to 'people at home who couldn't understand'). I was beginning to feel rather arrogant toward 'people at home.' But my mind was in a muddle; the War was too big an event for one man to stand alone in. All I knew was that I'd lost my faith in it, and there was nothing left to believe in except 'the Battalion spirit.' The Battalion spirit meant living oneself into comfortable companionship with the officers and N.C.O.'s around one; it meant winning the respect, or even the affection, of platoon and company."



Not only is there a sense of solidarity with one's own troops against civilians, there is even a feeling that the troops of all armies have a common grievance which to some extent unites them against the civilians of all States. Sherston records that in talking to civilians at home he might feel "secret antagonism to all complimentary references to the German Army."

Naturally it was not difficult to find justification for a rising embitterment against civilians.

"From the visible world I sought evidence which could aggravate my quarrel with acquiescent patriotism. Evidences of civilian callousness and complacency were plentiful, for the thriftless licence of war-time behaviour was an unavoidable spectacle, especially in the Savoy Hotel Grill Room which I visited more than once in my anxiety to reassure myself of the existence of the bloated profiteers and uniformed jacks in office. Watching the guzzlers in the Savoy (and conveniently overlooking the fact that some of them were officers on leave), I nourished my righteous hatred of them, anathematizing their appetites with the intolerance of youth which made me unable to realize that comfort-loving people are obliged to avoid self-knowledge—especially when there is a war on. But still I believe that in 1917 the idle, empty-headed, and frivolous ingredients of Society were having a tolerably good time, while the officious were being made self-important by nicely graded degrees of uniformed or un-uniformed war-emergency authority."

It was in this state of mind that he made his protest, beginning, "I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those



who have the power to end it." The awkward situation that he thus created was handled by everyone with the greatest gentlemanliness. Under the adroit persuasion of a friend, Sherston reluctantly agreed to let himself be regarded as suffering from a war neurosis. And after some months in the care of W. H. R. Rivers he finally returned to duty for the remainder of the war.

He certainly had nothing that resembled the ordinary incapacitating war neurosis, in spite of the strains of war having told heavily on him. His protest and reacquiescence form a most interesting hybrid. They provide a link between the neurotic symptom that marks individual breakdown and the socially intended revolt that precedes national collapse. Had he been a less fully conscious man, he would have had an incapacitating neurotic symptom. Had the State been on the verge of collapse, he might have been one of a group of officers forming the nucleus of a revolution or mutiny.

I spoke of Sherston's reacquiescence. In what state of mind did he return to duty? He certainly had no renewed faith in war. He was still in a state of protest against war as an institution, still feeling it monstrous that civilians should sanction it. His reasons for going back to military duty are left slightly obscure in the memoirs, and I must schematize in abstract terms what he leaves in all the fluidity of the shifting feelings which led to his decision.

The main reason, perhaps, was that the ruse which got him to accept the label "neurotic" had deprived him of his social relevance. Imprisoned, he would still



have been a thorn in the side of the community, a reminder that the ruling opinion of the group had enemies determined enough to attempt social disruption. But the label "abnormal," "not responsible," merely invalidated and made negligible everything he did. It had invalidated his protest; it would invalidate in advance any renewal of it. The only way to give his opinions any significance was to regain his own social relevance. And he notes that one element in his decision to go back was

"... exasperation against the people who pitied my 'wrong-headedness' and regarded me as 'not quite normal.' In their opinion it was quite right that I should be safely out of it and 'being looked after.' How else could I get my own back on them but by returning to the trenches? Killed in action in order to confute the Under-Secretary for War, who had officially stated that I wasn't responsible for my actions. What a truly glorious death for a promising young pacifist! . . ."

The return to military duty would, that is, by a sort of retro-active process, give significance to the attitude he had expressed.

However, the only part of the nation that he could bring himself to return into community with was the soldiers.

"For my soul had rebelled against the War, and not even Rivers could cure it of that . . . it was an angry soul, with no inclination to be nice to anyone except its fellow-soldiers. It wanted to see itself dominating the audience (mainly civilians) and dying defiantly in some lime-lit shell-hole . . ."



He held to the earlier false simplification which saw the troops exclusively as victims of the machinery of the State, and not as its accomplices too. Later on his maturer outlook led him to realize that at least the officers in some degree shared the responsibility for the war with the civilians and politicians.

"Since last year I seem to be getting outside of things a bit better. Recognizing the futility of war as much as ever, I dimly realize the human weakness which makes it possible. For I spend my time with people who are, most of them, too indolent-minded to think for themselves."

Watching his fellow-officers in a troopship, he writes:

"In a battle most of them would be splendid, one hopes. But army life away from the actual front is demoralizing. Remembrance of Rivers warns me against intolerance; but isn't this boat-load a sample of human folly which can accept war as an inevitable and useful element in the routine of life?"

He went through the rest of the war doing what he could for the men under him. One suspects that it was only his greater psychological distance from the men that allowed him not to realize that they too, in their degree, contributed to the prevailing acquiescence in war as an institution.

As he lay recovering from his last wound he experienced a mood in which many survivors must have entered on the peace:

"How could I begin my life all over again when I had no conviction about anything except that the War



was a dirty trick which had been played on me and my generation?"

And much later, in writing the memoirs, the war he writes of is "the War, which, as everyone now agrees, was a crime against humanity."

This is the post-war state of mind and the attitude of protest with which a prolonged modern war will, presumably, always end. Worn out with the minute particulars of war, the population feel that they themselves cannot have been responsible for all this—it was an external calamity, a crime, a trick. All they had agreed to was the principle that "where physical force is invoked for the destruction of values, moral and material, on which our very life depends, it is in the last resort only by physical force that the ravages of the evil spirit can be resisted and contained" (Lord Halifax, December 5, 1939). And they had agreed—in all the countries—that the machinery needed to implement that principle must be kept ready.



## CHAPTER XII

# Political Barriers Against War

SOME individual people in every nation are no doubt so free from responsibility for war, even indirect responsibility, that they can legitimately think in terms of "preventing" war. For our society as a whole, however, the question is rather that of giving up one of its institutions, and the idea of "relinquishing" war is psychologically more apt. Not only does it give the truer indication of widely shared responsibility; it also implies a more clinical handling of the problem, for it encourages insight into the fact that there are understandable reasons, apart from wickedness and stupidity, why war has not been given up before. The idea of prevention leads too readily—as in movements for the prevention of drunkenness—to self-righteous authoritarianism—that is to say, to the dominative attitude in its most securely entrenched form.

The problem of helping forward the process of relinquishing war is so many-sided that the only sound policy is to welcome help from every possible quarter. Economists, sociologists, psychologists, psycho-analysts,



historians, churchmen, and politicians all have their suggestions to make and their convictions to uphold. One thing is certain: that when any of these specialists asserts that his way is the only way, or that his is the one fundamental diagnosis, he is—on the most charitable interpretation—mistaken. Less charitably, he is revealing a bumptious and unscrupulous professionalism.

The mutual repercussions of war and politics, war and economics, war and social psychology, mean that war is the point of intersection of several vicious circles. The only sound policy is to attack simultaneously at as many points as possible. Few of the suggestions put forward are incompatible with one another, and if we can combine them little is to be gained from arguing which goes deepest. The likelihood is that if a *complete* change of political institutions could be made, or a complete change of individual outlook, or a complete economic change, any one of these might eradicate war. In practice these complete changes do not occur. And a partial weakening of merely one of the vicious circles will be made null by the persistence of the others. The only reasonable hope lies in weakening as many of them as possible simultaneously.

The direct political attack on the problem is the one that most invites psychological comment. To our habitual outlook it seems the most natural way of eradicating war, and at the same time it bristles with psychological difficulties. Naturally the detailed problems of the political reformer are beyond the scope of this book, and it is possible to touch on only one or two points where the psychological themes dealt with



in earlier chapters are relevant to his task. The most important is what can be briefly described as the problem of creating units of government that will correspond with the more spontaneous psychological groupings. It is the complex problem of giving political recognition to the realities of group loyalty. For at present people's spontaneous loyalties overlap and criss-cross in ways which the national states not only fail to reflect but often conflict with. To take examples from close at hand, we can think of Ireland, India, French Canada, Dutch South Africa, and Palestine. In one form or another this problem constantly crops up in connection with war. Rival States embarrass each other by fostering minority grievances. The relief of minorities, the "rectification of frontiers," the right of self-determination, provide unfailing slogans for justifying war. And at the same time the coming of war very frequently brings a truce to minority conflicts and a temporary easing of the strain.

From a slightly different angle political reformers who are working to abolish war constantly harp on the same theme. They admit that loyalty to the existing States and nations does certainly occur and may be strong. But other loyalties are often more spontaneous and contemporary in growth, less dependent on the appeal to historical tradition. And these frequently fail to correspond with the boundaries of the State. There is something absurdly arbitrary about governmental divisions which can force scientists, priests, engineers, painters, doctors, to go to war with the doctors, painters, engineers, priests, and scientists of another



geographical region. To dissolve State boundaries, at least for some purposes, would set the seal on supra-national loyalties and community of interest which in many directions are already achieved. Not only highly developed professional interests, but a tremendous array of simple interests in the common things of everyday life are already shared widely enough to form a texture of mutual understanding and sympathy that spreads from one State to another and ignores their boundaries.

But in other directions the contrary holds: regional loyalties often make even the present nations too large, and so give rise to protest against regimentation and central dictation. Familiar domestic examples can be seen in the nationalist movements of Wales and Scotland, and even in the regionalism that the B.B.C. dimly recognizes. The Treaty of Versailles also gave political recognition to some of these smaller regional groupings, though no doubt with mixed motives.

No generalization on these problems is likely to be sound, but one can tentatively suppose that *interests*, of a developed and fairly specific kind, produce loyalties which the national State is far too small to satisfy. But what may roughly be called *temperamental qualities*—very generalized preferences for certain attitudes and sentiments, and preferences for certain broad lines of interest and outlook—these produce loyalties and common sympathies for which the State is too large. We know in a general way (and could no doubt discover in much more detail) that differences of language can embody these subtleties of temperament and outlook; and this is perhaps one reason, among many others, why such



vigorous conflict occurs over the language of State-submerged minorities.

The more closely the realities of group psychology are examined the more formidable appear the politician's difficulties. They are difficulties that must in some way be met, and the efforts of the political reformer are not to be belittled. But to think of political reform as a short cut to better psychological conditions in society is extraordinarily optimistic. It implies a boundless faith in the ingenuity of the human mind applied to governmental machinery, a direction in which the human mind has in fact shown very little fertility.

Closely related to the problem of giving political recognition to the realities of group loyalty is the problem of creating *intelligible* political units. How, that is, can we form political units whose corporate decisions are intelligible to their individual members? Or ought we not to try? Some may argue that the blind national loyalty of the person of average or below-average ability—even of the highly intelligent and well-informed person—is inevitable and not to be worried about. This view, I think, is the product of despair. It is the view of minds which have become so submissive to the vastness of national and international machinery that they can no longer think of political institutions as their own tools, tools serving the purposes of reasonable social beings. But those who do take the intelligible political unit as an ideal may envisage their task in two different ways. Firstly, they may aim at simplifying the political units which claim the individual's loyalty. Secondly,



they may hope so to increase the individual's information and judgment that he will really be able to understand what the existing State Governments are doing.

The first policy brings up exceedingly difficult problems in local government and local community. It is not enough to secure intelligible small groups unless we also ensure that they shall be effectively affiliated to the rest of the world. Wastefully isolated economic units, parochial in culture and outlook, are obviously not the ideal. One means by which individual people, even now, are given intelligible membership of an international group is found in the occupational association. Scientists, doctors, miners, athletes, and so on have international associations whose aims and decisions can be as intelligible to the individual member as the doings of his local community. These in themselves are not enough to solve the problem of securing intelligibility without parochialism. All that can be said here is that the problem does exist.<sup>1</sup> For the present purpose the chief point is that in both the local community and the world-wide association for specialized interests a ruling opinion emerges out of vastly greater individual comprehension—and therefore responsibility—than the ruling opinions which nowadays sanction the policy of States, including their wars. At present the corporate decisions of the intelligible groups have relatively little influence. The decisions that count are State decisions. They emerge out of a jumble of the aims of innumer-

<sup>1</sup> The Switzerland of Sir Alfred Zimmern is relevant to the question.



able smaller groups, and they are offered as plausibly as may be to a public which cannot trace or assess the real influences that produced them.

To many people, however, it seems out of the question to alter our political machinery so extensively that political action becomes intelligible to the individual. They have more faith in improving the individual's information and judgment to the point where our existing units of government—or even larger units—grow comprehensible. Some will believe that this aim can never be achieved. But though its full realization may be impossible, efforts in this direction must always be of the utmost importance. And here too political thinking and psychological thinking converge on the question of “educating public opinion.”

The political reformer is acutely aware of the problem. Advances in political thinking, in sociological and economic analysis, in the demographic survey of populations may all help to discredit war as a social institution, and yet be of little account if they cannot be “got across” to huge and poorly educated publics. The beliefs of the man in the street are often more important for political purposes than the facts as the competent specialist sees them. Popular beliefs about overpopulation, for instance, or about the economic value of the British colonies, have been seriously challenged by the specialists, but may still help to mobilize public opinion in favour of war.

If the opponent of war believes that a better understanding of political, economic, and diplomatic realities will help his case, a great part of his effort will be



devoted to educating public opinion. Here, as with other social reforms, his efforts will reinforce and perhaps modify movements that are already afoot: the education of children and adolescents, education for citizenship, adult education, and educational movements with more specifically political aims. In this connection one psychological point of practical importance arises: the difference between education and propaganda. Almost any so-called "educational" programme, if it has political implications, will be called propagandist by its opponents. The difficulty of rebutting this charge has led many people not only to admit but to avow a propagandist intention and to assert that non-propagandist education is an idealist's figment. The question may seem abstract, but on a long view it has enormous importance, and a psychological answer to it ought to be attempted.

To begin with, it is well to admit that the word "propaganda" cannot be limited to persuasion that makes use of wittingly dishonest arguments; the distinction between conscious and unconscious dishonesty and between relevant and irrelevant pressures can seldom be upheld with certainty. A far more satisfactory usage is to apply the term to any persuasion that is dominative in intention. Even argument that has no trace of dishonesty may be called propaganda if it proceeds with the sole intention of securing other people's agreement and support.

What other intention could it have? There is another. The initiator may express his view more tentatively and offer it with the feeling that, though he would like



the other to agree, it is much more important that this other person should test it thoroughly, to the full extent of his capacity, and in the light of his own information and his own scale of values. In other words, the initiator values not mere agreement and the increased social power or sense of solidarity which that produces; he values agreement as a sign that his conviction has been tried out in another human context and found to be satisfactory there as well. If this is his approach his main concern will be for the quality of the act of agreement, and this will affect his whole presentation of the subject. Instead of aiming at the greatest plausibility of presentation he will aim at the greatest fairness, and it will be as important to stress the limitations of his case, and the attractiveness of conflicting views, as to display its strength. This way of presenting a case, rare though it is, ought perhaps to be the ideal of the educator whenever he offers his own value judgments or opinions to another person.

In practice, of course, much that we call education is just a mixture of propaganda and instruction. Instruction itself need not be propagandist. If the learner has spontaneously adopted certain aims and asks an acknowledged master to show him a way of achieving them, the relationship of master and pupil can be thoroughly integrative. It is in defining the child's aims for him that ordinary education is domineering and propagandist. Instruction in French, say, is not propaganda. But the various pressures through which the child has been made to accept the view that he ought to learn French—or read the Bible or admire



Shakespeare or play cricket—are propaganda. No doubt a great deal of domination of this sort is justifiable for practical purposes. But it ought not to be forgotten that a different way—an “integrative” way—of offering one’s interests and attitudes to another person is possible. In the complex and uncertain topics on which adult citizens are expected to form an opinion, this integrative education is exceptionally important. In fact, the only safeguard we could have against propaganda would be to establish this attitude as the norm, as the usual way for handling any such topics. Only such a norm could serve to show up and discredit the propagandist.

Is it necessary to discredit the propagandist? Might we not leave things as they are now, when the truth is expected to emerge from a tug-of-war between would-be triumphant convictions? To the scientist there should be no doubt about the answer, although, lamentably, many scientists are the most determined of propagandists when they discuss social and political problems. The objection to the dominative spreading of convictions, even honest convictions, is its wastefulness. When error creeps in, as it must, the forcibleness or plausibility with which it is put forward may protect it from general exposure for years or for ever. It is not enough for the advocates of the other side to have a better case; they must have equal force and persuasiveness. And this reduces the discussion of important problems to what is, in essence, little better than the thrust and parry of the law courts or the puerilities of the debating society.



In the end, the man who uses educational movements primarily as means of spreading his convictions is likely to prove a menace. The danger is that two can play at that game. Convictions set up by propagandist influence are always precarious if there is any freedom at all for counter-propaganda. Those who work for a better background of public judgment, therefore, need to remember that propaganda is no less propaganda because the intentions behind it are enlightened. The only process that will increase the ability to judge, and not merely alter judgments, is education of a non-propagandist kind. And this means that every fresh presentation of a point of view is to be regarded not solely as a missionary enterprise but also as a new test of one's case. Those who attempt a non-authoritarian form of education very soon discover how severe a test it may be to present a case even to the uninformed or unintelligent; in fact, it is usually the simplified statement of a viewpoint which leads to the awkward questions being asked.

But reliance on integrative education will never appeal to the political reformer. He must have above all a convincing case, and this, in an over-size group, is inevitably a falsely simplified case. It is not only for his hearers that he must simplify the facts: he must do it for himself too if he is to form convictions strong enough to act on. There is, in fact, small hope that education bearing directly on State politics will be non-propagandist; it may be so at some points, but not extensively. Integrative education or any form of the scientific spirit in State politics would have to be



too tentative and groping to achieve anything. Fully to face the extent of one's ignorance about the affairs of a nation is likely to have a paralysing effect.

All due allowance made for this difficulty, it remains true that much can be done to *improve* the background of information and understanding against which the public makes its political judgments. Apart from the dissemination of facts and interpretations, a great deal can be done in exposing the propagandist deceits of the past. New circumstances produce new propaganda, and the public seem to be just as susceptible to the new as they were to the old; but probably as time goes on propaganda does grow a little less crude, and the nations and their leaders have to go to a little more trouble to devise effective self-deceits and rationalizations. And this is something to the good. Yet we must continue to expect a great deal of blindness in the loyalty that people feel for a modern State.

Moreover, nothing in the psychological study of war suggests that wars arise merely through ignorance or warrants the hope that improved information will in itself keep war at bay. Admittedly the publics are deceived about the causes of any given war. Yet to a great extent the deceits are only ways of making more vivid a conviction which the nation as a corporate body would in any case have reached. To take the war of 1914, it is quite arguable that the British public would have agreed to go to war to prevent whatever balance of power was likely to result from a rapid German victory over France. Even the oil wells about which Sassoon felt such indignation might well have



seemed a worthy thing to fight for if their implications for the British Empire, and its implications for the sentiments of the ordinary citizen, could have been vividly displayed. In fact, of course, the "scrap of paper" and the Belgian atrocity stories offered a simpler and more rapid means of convincing people. But information could be increased and political judgment and insight improved to a tremendous extent without any reliable barrier against war being thereby built up. For political thinking, however sound, goes on at present in a framework of which one of the main features is the institution of war as a valid means of settling differences between States.

But the political reformer who works against war seldom relies on general education and propaganda alone; he has plans for changing political institutions in such a way as to exclude war. The view has got about—aided by such writings as Glover's *War, Sadism, and Pacifism*—that psychological theory greatly belittles these efforts or even denies that they have any value at all. This is a misunderstanding, either of or by psycho-analytic theory. There is no justification for assuming that social institutions are unimportant in bringing wars about simply because deeper unconscious causes also operate; to take this view is to give way to that over-simplification towards which scientific inquiry is constantly tempted when it meets the complexity of social phenomena.

It is in this connection that a theory like Perry's has such great corrective value. The human nature we know is institutionalized human nature, not the inevit-



able biological product that an uncritical reading of psycho-analysis would suggest. Political reformers are right in pointing out that in previous centuries we had not only wars but much more violence in civil life too. The latter has been immensely reduced by changes in public outlook, which have been sanctioned and carried further by political and legal machinery. Nor is there any evidence that owing to the reduction of civil violence wars are any more frequent or, in psychological intention, any more violent than before. True, the scale of their destructiveness is increased by technical advances, but the new methods of warfare have far outstripped our psychological gusto in applying them. They are devised by chemists and engineers, who are following their occupation as peacefully as clergymen or teachers. And in application these technical advances have greatly reduced the emotional heat of combat. Consider, for instance, Sassoon's description:

"... patrols had a sensible habit of avoiding personal contact with one another. Men in the Tunnelling Company who emerged, blinking and dusty white, from the mine-shafts, had heard the enemy digging deep underground. They may even have heard the muffled mutter of German voices. But, apart from the projectiles he sent us, the enemy was, as far as we were concerned, an unknown quantity. The Staff were the people who knew all about him. . . ."

Modern warfare is admittedly not all like that, but gusto in killing and attacking is at all events not more prominent than it was in earlier wars.

We may assume with some confidence that the



amount of violence—inflicted or suffered—in the ordinary European's life has been greatly reduced in the last few centuries. This has been done through changes in institutions which register, consolidate, and extend changes in the conscious standards of the public. The political reformer has good reason for going ahead without the stultifying fear that the violence he bottles up here is bound to burst out with equal force there. Even if it could be shown that *aggression* acted in this way, we have still to bear in mind that aggression can take many other forms than physical violence. And the political reformer probably believes that economic and domestic tyrannies of various kinds are at least preferable to physical assault and slaughter.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Freudian writings give the political reformer support in one of his most usual convictions: the conviction that coercion will be necessary in order to secure peace. Most of those who work to eradicate war by political reform are believers in some form of international coercive authority. Such plans as collective security, the "New Commonwealth" scheme, and Federal Union envisage some form of international army or armed "police" to enforce the decisions of the supra-national authority. It is only natural that a dominative society, trying to root out the most dangerous form of its domination, should turn at once to domination on an even grander scale.

The method has had some success in the past, as the relative peacefulness of various empires and united kingdoms shows. But many of these unions have broken up, and the peacefulness is only relative. The disrupt-



tion may just miss armed conflict, as in the secession of Norway from Sweden. Or there may be fighting, as in Ireland; the fact that it has the status only of a rebellion and a punitive expedition hardly makes such a conflict preferable to war. Any huge block of social groups with a central Government holds these dangers, even if authority has been willingly delegated to the Government in the first place. Nor is it safe to assume that overwhelming military power in the hands of the central Government will prevent war. The small wars of recent history have shown that local resistance may be desperately strong against tremendous odds.

However, according to Freudian doctrine, central coercion is the only possible method of securing a peaceful world order. Lasswell [1935], for instance, who hopes for a world State, believes that a monopoly of coercion in the hands of some *élite* is a necessary part of it. He sees clearly that the violence of war tapers off into authoritarian coercion of other kinds. To him the problem is not to persuade people to renounce "coerciveness," but to ensure that it is used to support a total world policy—of a type, of course, that he happens to think satisfactory.

In taking this line Lasswell is following Freud, who maintained that "it is just as impossible to do without government of the masses by a minority as it is to dispense with coercion in the work of civilization." But there is ample room for disagreement with Freud's doctrine on this point, and the case against it has been well put by Ian Suttie [1935]. Suttie takes the view that Freud's mind never emerged from the extremely



patriarchal mould in which it was formed, and that this has in many respects produced distortions in his doctrines. Suttie's arguments are too detailed and extensive to summarize here, but to the non-Freudian his case is highly convincing. Among the distortions which were thus produced in Freudian doctrine Suttie includes belief in the necessity of coercion. He notes Freud's belief that

"leaders 'should be independent of the masses by having at their disposal means of enforcing their authority.' And he continues: As Freud ranks himself with the moderns, presumably he means machine guns, poison gas, and bombing 'planes. One is almost inclined to assume that Freud also is among the prophets who will be quoted by those who exclaim 'Heil Hitler!' "

Freud's flight from Austria is one comment on his doctrine. Like many others who fled from that particular coercive order, he could see no social principle to take the place of coercion. Much present-day sociological and political thinking is framed almost entirely in terms of domination. Its stress falls on social *élites*, the direction of the masses by propaganda, shifts of power within social groups, and the alignment of individuals and classes with the forces operating in social process; such thinking is cast rigidly in the mould of domination and submission.

The assumptions of a dominative society have been challenged, and their psychological validity denied, by three psychological writers: Perry, Suttie, and Anderson. Each works entirely from his own specialized standpoint, and none of them makes any reference to



the other two. As an anthropologist, Perry emphasizes the fact that cultures have very largely *created* their institutions of coercive domination. Suttie's contribution (cf. Chapter XIV) is made from the psychotherapeutic standpoint. He shows the mechanisms within the family which enable our society to perpetuate its dominative pattern, and which create a closed circuit shielding its assumptions from criticism. Anderson has given the most fundamental statement of the nature of domination and the alternative to it. His work, moreover, has brought the question within range of the most matter-of-fact and verifiable observation. For the present problem the importance of these three writers is that they invite us to conceive of a texture of social life which would stand in sharp contrast to war and would not be merely a taming of the same coercive principle.



## CHAPTER XIII

# The Notion of Peace

SUPPOSING we took these ideas seriously, what conception of a peaceful society should we reach? Some people seem to assume that the most utopian hope for society is that of reaching a condition in which disagreements and dislikes no longer occur—neither between individuals nor between groups. Stressing the “brotherhood of man,” some liberals and pacifists tend to deny the persistent differences between one social group and another; they belittle the differences between German and Frenchman, Jew and Gentile, negro and white, labourer and shopkeeper, village and city. Now this, for all its mild amiability, is a typical outcome of the dominative attitude. It shows the dominative mind in reverse, reacting against itself. L. H. Myers has well typified it in the character of Smith, the humanist:

“People like Fazul, by the mere fact of their existence, give Smith evidence of the inadequacy of his conception of human nature, and arouse in him an unacknowledged hostility. Smith’s intolerance of intolerance is nothing short of fanatical. He does not like to be disturbed in his comfortable belief that the



whole human race, if it only knew its own mind a little better, would realize that it wants just what he wants and dislikes just what he dislikes."

This type of humanism is not an alternative to domination. For a true alternative we must turn to some such conception as Anderson's "social integration." The integrative attitude aims neither at leaving people as they are nor at making them like oneself, for it regards differences between two people as mutual invitations to development. Far from denying differences, it gives the closest attention to them, seeing them as an enrichment of human potentiality. Such an attitude does not imply a spineless or irresponsible abandoning of standards, nor a meek submissiveness. It does not exclude strong preferences and bitter dislikes. All that it does exclude is the itch to root out what we dislike. It implies that even the complete conviction that another person's view is inferior to our own is no good reason for trying to alter it by pressure or propaganda. We can show the other person an alternative, if he is willing to be shown, but if he still likes his own way better there's an end to it. And this amounts to saying that, if integrative behaviour is impossible at some points of contact with our associates, then at those points we must forgo any true *social* relationship. The self-deception of a dominative society consists in the belief that at such points full social satisfactions can still be obtained in the relationship of self-assertion and self-submission. In fact the dominative society suggests that to win submissive deference from others is one of the highest satisfactions that social



life can offer, whether to individuals or to national groups.

Here a possible misconception must be guarded against. It might be thought that a non-dominative society would involve a belief in some "equality" between people which would deny us the important satisfactions of winning social prestige. But this would be a complete mistake. The integrative relationship in social contacts means that an outstanding achievement by one person will win the *respect* of the others but not their *deference*. These terms will perhaps serve, though the reader may prefer others. All that matters is that the distinction should be noticed. The essential distinction is that when deference is present the admiration expressed for a particular achievement may be to some extent bogus, expressed partly in order not to disappoint the expectation of deference. Simple respect, on the other hand, represents a judgment which has been made without any irrelevant pressure; the admiration which is expressed has arisen spontaneously. If you withhold respect the person who wanted it will be disappointed, and he may consider your judgment mistaken, but he will not consider that you have failed in an obligation to him. The social obligation is satisfied equally by admiration and by adverse criticism.

Giving a person respect implies that you admire him for some specific reason, but it does not commit you to admiring him in other directions or deferring to his opinions or acquiescing in his intentions. It implies the role of companion—at least at this point of contact—and not servant or subordinate. But where deference

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has been established the deferential person cannot withhold his respect from any of the other's achievements without some faint degree of rebellion. In polite society, naturally, this goes on with the utmost delicacy. Those who enjoy deference are often most anxious to encourage—at their own discretion—some measure of independent criticism in their associates. But in the last resort they expect, and are expected, to take the dominant part. Admiration, agreement, support, come not as social gifts made freely on each separate occasion, but partly as tribute in recognition of a permanent, generalized relationship existing between them and their associates. There can consequently never be any certainty that irrelevant pressures have not contributed to an opinion offered to one who enjoys deference.

Deference arises in a setting of domination and submission, respect in one of integration. But again it must be emphasized that respect does not imply equality between the companions concerned. The schoolboy respects certain famous cricketers; he is not equal to them, but he respects one and withholds respect from another according to his spontaneous convictions. On the other hand, his polite attention to the speech-day celebrity arises from deference. The celebrity has power over the young animate objects in front of him; the cricketer has the respect of young social beings. Naturally, in our society, respect and deference get hopelessly entangled. Respect for a particular achievement is constantly expected to carry with it general deference. The eminent scientist expects deference to his political views; the wealthy stockbroker to his taste in house



furnishing; the distinguished military man to his views on the upbringing of children. Incidentally, we must also notice that deference may be accompanied by love. Loving deference is the accepted attitude for young children towards their parents. At adolescence the tricky crossing to respect has to be attempted. What often emerges is continued affection, a show of deference, and no respect.

Social intercourse is at present organized mainly along gradients of deference. Noble birth, wealth, formal education, age, sex (producing deference for men and a show of deference for women), bureaucratic and quasi-bureaucratic authority, power to employ and power to buy (even in a small way) are some of the guiding lines for deference. Fame and eminence, which might be valued as a mark of the genuine respect of those competent to judge, are in fact valued largely for the deference they secure; hence there is no reason for not achieving them by fraud and bluff. A society in which respect took the place which deference at present holds, and integrative behaviour replaced dominative and submissive, would be remarkably different from ours. But, as Ruth Benedict points out, very sweeping changes in social norms can occur, and have occurred in Western communities even in comparatively recent times. When the change is complete the extreme representatives of the old norm strike us as pathological. Benedict sees such a possibility for our own present culture:

"In our own generation extreme forms of ego-gratification are culturally supported in a similar



fashion. Arrogant and unbridled egoists as family men, as officers of the law, and in business, have been again and again portrayed by novelists and dramatists, and they are familiar in every community. Like the behaviour of Puritan divines, their courses of action are often more asocial than those of the inmates of penitentiaries. In terms of the suffering and frustration that they spread about them there is probably no comparison. There is very possibly at least as great a degree of mental warping. Yet they are entrusted with positions of great influence and importance and are as a rule fathers of families. Their impress both upon their own children and upon the structure of our society is indelible. They are not described in our manuals of psychiatry because they are supported by every tenet of our civilization. They are sure of themselves in real life in a way that is possible only to those who are orientated to the points of the compass laid down in their own culture. Nevertheless a future psychiatry may well ransack our novels and letters and public records for illumination upon a type of abnormality to which it would not otherwise give credence."

The tenets of our civilization which sanction these people result from the fact that our social intercourse is cast in the mould of domination, resistance, submission and deference. In a more integrative society such people would stand out as quite evidently diseased.

But, if we prefer integrative behaviour, what psychological roots has this preference? Is it just a personal choice which depends on temperamental qualities? I think it can be shown to have deeper roots. The objection to domination is that it comes inevitably into conflict with the more developed forms of social impulse. As social interests and the desire for companion-



ship develop and are clarified it is towards integrative relationships that they lead. The domineering, the sycophantic, the aggressive, the obsequious, the overpliant, and the dependent all gain social satisfactions of a kind. But they all meet the same difficulty: companionship, sympathy, mutual liking and esteem are satisfactions that cannot be obtained by using force or yielding to it. Our social development cannot proceed very far before this inherent objection to the use of force appears. Once we reach the point of wanting people not merely to serve and support us but also to like us and give us their free respect, force can never secure what we want. Demanding affection with menaces is an infantile weakness whose illogic we can easily see, at least in our more adult moments. But it takes some time to realize this, and naturally many people never do. All life long they try to bully others—with open aggressiveness or emotional blackmail—into liking them, respecting their views and achievements, giving them affectionate consideration. They often get a good imitation of what they want, but the observer—and often they themselves—can see it as

... "mouth honour, breath,  
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."

Or, worse still, they have a gnawing suspicion that they are being "humoured." The central dilemma of the dominative person is that he cannot high-handedly reject his associate's disagreement without implicitly depreciating his agreement. By domination he belittles the other person socially, and so diminishes the value



of his companionship. As social development proceeds, slaves, hired "companions," prostitutes, flatterers and parasites, yes-men and noddies grow less and less satisfactory. Companionship, appreciation, agreement, offered freely and without pressure, are what a developed social interest leads us to value.

Fundamentally, I believe, it is this development of social responsiveness that makes us begin to feel half-hearted about warfare nowadays. The material cost and the physical danger and misery all count. But the greatest objection is a creeping sense of the pointlessness of war. People let their thoughts wander too soon to the peace conference, where, if they are the victors, they know that the only course will be to try to restore a companionship with the vanquished. In exasperated reaction against this rather paralysing truth the more naïve begin to talk of wholesale extermination. Let us convince ourselves, they say in effect, that the Germans (or the French or Russians or British, according to the State we happen to be fighting) are literally sub-human, not to be given any more *social* regard than a horde of bubonic rats. Wipe them out and start afresh! In fact, of course, we cannot do this: we have allowed our social nature to develop too far. Both the half-heartedness and the exasperated blood-thirstiness are the result of perceiving the inconsistency of warfare—the onslaught on people as if they were bubonic rats, all the time with the intention of winning more satisfactory companionship from them.

It is not only war that brings out this dilemma of a dominative society. Another closely related problem,



that of the handling of criminals, reveals precisely the same difficulty. In the older penal methods we reject some part of the criminal's personality with entire confidence in our own standards and as high-handedly as we should nip diseased buds out of a plant. This would be all right if we wanted him solely as a docile slave, an animate machine. But, inconsistently, we then expect him to become "rehabilitated" as a social being. He must bring the remains of his personality, pruned and trimmed according to our taste, and trustfully offer us that in full companionship. It is not surprising that this method has been one long-drawn-out failure. Now, fortunately, a change has begun, a change which arises out of the same increased social responsiveness that makes wars begin to look futile. We are coming to realize that a social group cannot expect the gift of a personality, even an unsatisfactory one, unless it meets it socially. And that means meeting it non-dominatively. Consequently modern penal reform and the scientific treatment of delinquency have tended towards a more integrative attitude to the criminal. It is recognized that his peculiarities can be dealt with only if society is willing to modify itself as well as him. He has done something that society does not like, and it usually turns out that society had already done something that he did not like. In other words, a series of differences has occurred, all of them handled with domination on one side and resistance on the other. The only sound policy is to find an integrative way of undoing what has been done to the criminal. Society, through the agency of its psycho-therapists, must invite



him to re-examine the underlying dispute and must offer him society's point of view in a more integrative way than he has met with in the past.

This detached point of view, however, cannot guide us in dealing with every immediate problem. Once a social conflict has assumed an acute form, as in crime and equally in war, dominative behaviour is prompted by the simple need to preserve one's existence and one's essential ideals. No advocate of penal reform doubts the necessity of vigorous law enforcement while we actually have dangerous criminals amongst us. In the same way, under the onslaught of an enemy whose aims we see as disastrous to ourselves and our principles, resistance seems to most of us to be imperative. A pacifist can be sustained only by an intense faith in a rather debatable view of divine intention or of social process. To most people it seems clear that the failure to resist violent attack by an aggressive State, far from ensuring a more integrative international order, will mean the triumph of the dominative. A nation whose traditional outlook has in some degree favoured integrative behaviour, in foreign policy as in social life, is faced with a serious dilemma: its very success in fulfilling these principles may put it at the mercy of nations whose social immaturity and political crudity will not only wipe out the progress which has been made towards social integration but will also put formidable obstacles in the way of its ever beginning again.

When social conflict assumes the acute form of war it is inevitable that the enemy should be treated simply as a dangerous object and his social significance allowed



to fall into the background. Yet there are signs that this attitude towards another social group tends to give way to a rather more integrative attitude once the need for self-preservation has been met. Neurotically domitative governments may for long prevent their public from returning to a true social interest in the national enemy or the subjugated people. But in doing so they are attempting what is—in the very long run—the hopeless task of obstructing a natural tendency. The worst danger past, our social interests do tend to reassert themselves. This is seen, for example, in the dealings of pioneers and colonists with the indigenous peoples. Fierce exterminatory wars are followed by a sobering-up process when the danger is clearly past, and the settlers then begin to make guilty efforts to save the remnants of the natives from extinction. Indeed, this question of whether the danger is past lies at the root of the whole problem of domination. Domination arises out of insecurity.

From this it follows that many people are socially responsive and can enter deeply into the situation of another only when that other is very obviously helpless. Doing down a slightly weaker business rival is one thing, but robbing a child's money-box or a blind man's begging-cup is another. The civilian rejoices to hear of the ambushing of enemy troops; but the torpedoing of an enemy hospital ship would produce different feelings, and a properly conducted censorship spares him news of successes like that. In the same way it takes the wind out of our sails when a man we dislike falls seriously ill.



The familiar inconsistencies in our social attitudes mean that a dominative society tends to canalize its strongest social feelings and its impulses of tenderness in caring for the weak and helpless. A rather sentimental heightening of social responsiveness occurs in a limited direction. A more integrative texture of society would make us want to be deeply friendly and considerate even towards the able-bodied and mentally sound—even, that is, towards potential rivals. This is something totally different from “humanitarian” feeling, and altogether more robust. It is heightened social responsiveness which allows us to feel the *social* importance of ordinary people (not just the help or hindrance they can be to our own plans) without waiting till they are reduced to the psychological level of children, cripples, or paupers.

Such a form of social life would be many generations distant even if the whole world got on to the right lines at once. It is, therefore, “utopian” in the derogatory sense of being difficult to achieve. It is not utopian in the other sense, of producing a completely satisfactory society. People could live in integrative social intercourse and still pursue futile, crude, or puerile interests. The notion of social integration is quite limited. It refers only to the relations that people could establish with each other and not to the value of their pursuits. It refers in fact to a very simple state of social affairs which, as Anderson shows, can at times be seen amongst pre-school children. Yet it offers the only complete contrast to that type of social intercourse which finds a perfectly natural outcome in war.



## CHAPTER XIV

# Relinquishing Domination

If we accept some such notion of peace as the preceding chapter has suggested, how are we to set about reaching it? Must we work through the broad features of political machinery or through the more intimate structure of social life? If there seems to be an alternative here it is a delusion. Neither line of work can succeed without the other. In particular, political institutions can never far outrun the sentiments and habits of thought of individual citizens. When a law is passed on the strength of ruling opinions that are only precariously established—as, for instance, those that supported prohibition in America—slight shifts of opinion are enough to cause a land-slide in which the whole institutional structure collapses. International politics are no different. The citizen who browbeats his subordinates, bluffs and tricks his rivals, and is in turn snubbed by his wife and daughters, cannot suddenly become a different man when he argues about politics. He cannot wholeheartedly support an integrative policy in foreign affairs, a policy which may mean giving way when we have the power to stand firm. Political maturity cannot outrun ordinary social maturity. All that the



political institution can do is to consolidate the more intimate social advances and thus help to create the conditions for further advance.

The first fact to be recognized is that the dominative method of handling differences cannot be relinquished while people feel insecure. As Anderson points out, domination is the product of insecurity in the face of differences and in turn generates further insecurity. Now one feature of our social order is the "expectation of violence," and this helps to keep alive throughout the nations the very insecurity that we want to end. It follows that any changes which make for greater resistance to war may be valuable, even if in one sense they are relatively superficial. They may not form an impregnable barrier against war, but by slightly increasing the obstacles in its way they do something to increase that sense of security which makes domination and resistance seem less necessary.

Ambitious changes in international machinery may help. The sense of security which the League of Nations fostered for a time almost certainly contributed to the reluctance with which European populations entered upon war in 1939. Of greater importance, probably, were the popular movements that supported the League or contributed to the general political climate in which it could live. Religious teachers, pacifists, political reformers, and propagandists of many kinds played their part. They strengthened the social ideals that opposed war, they popularized economic objections to war, they were a constant reminder of the suffering and brutalization that it brings, they encouraged the



cultural contacts that makes nations reluctant to fight one another (and necessitate, in the early days of war, the propagandist's distinction between the people and the leaders of the enemy State). It is a mistake to be too cast down at the ease with which the Governments—especially of Totalitarian States—were able to change this spirit and evoke in some sections of their people the old enthusiasm for national military power. We should take comfort from the fact that they had to make a deliberate effort to create a state of mind which, before 1914, had been a much more spontaneous growth. The various peace movements undoubtedly help to erect barriers against war. Compared with the effort that goes into them and the strength they seem to have in the heyday of peace, they turn out, when war draws near, to be surprisingly flimsy, walls that go down rather easily before a few good trumpet blasts of rationalization. None the less they do something.

Another type of reform works in rather the same way and might be pressed forward far more vigorously than it is. The pacifist movement concentrates mainly on opposition to war. The complementary movement, not so usually stressed, would aim at increasing people's attachment to peace. It was suggested earlier (cf. Chapter VII) that war brings—or in its early stages seems to offer—certain compensations, the easing of certain strains, mainly unconscious. The psychoanalysts might be *totally* wrong in saying that people unconsciously want war. But it could still be true, as I believe, that unconsciously a vast number of people would not mind a change from peace—a change from



the unsatisfactory sort of peace that they know. Of these people it is true to say that they hate war more than they love peace. And what could be more natural? The social reformer quite rightly asks why they cannot be relieved from the discontents of an unsatisfactory peace-time existence without resort to war.

Once again he will put his faith in changes at the conscious level and once again will to some extent be disappointed. Yet important progress can be made at that level, and whatever deeper factors may need considering, the environmental difficulties are real and cannot be neglected. Working life, for instance, with its implications for social life in general, is one of the very broad fields in which vast improvements could occur. Opportunity to work and reasonable security of work naturally loom large, and here the political and economic reformer finds scope for his efforts. The individual's occupation is the chief way in which he makes contact with the group as a whole and assures himself of having a function and being wanted. But simply having a job will not offer very full satisfactions if the working hours have to be regarded (in the apt phrase of Sapir) "as a desert patch of merely economic effort in the whole of life." And here the psychologist must take a hand. The aridness of work arises in various ways. In many of the lowest-paid occupations the intrinsic interest of the task is slight, even for the less intelligent worker who requires only simple duties. This is partly due to inherent features of modern industry and commerce. But that characteristic of modern work can easily be exaggerated. Industrial psychology has



already done something, and—given the opportunity—could do very much more, to increase the intrinsic interest and reduce the futility which the worker finds in industrial processes. In better-paid occupations there is rarely quite such aridness; but intense discontent and unhappiness are often met with, especially where people have taken up work for which they were not suited. Not all of this discontent, but a large proportion of it, could certainly be avoided if greater use were made of the techniques of vocational guidance that are now available. Imperfect as they are, they are still much better than nothing, and the way to improve them is to use them more widely and expect more of them.

Apart from satisfactions and frustrations arising from the nature of one's actual work, the social atmosphere in which it is carried out is of the utmost importance. This in fact very largely decides how satisfactory the working hours shall be. Culpin and Smith, in their studies of the incidence of psycho-neurotic conditions in industry, have shown not only how widespread these conditions are among all grades of worker, but also how readily they express themselves as difficulties in the social aspects of working life. The worker's attitude to those in authority, his success in making satisfactory contact with his fellow-workers, his handling of subordinates, his behaviour when criticized: all these features of his social life at work reflect the more intimate state of his personality. Equally, they reinforce it. The neurotic supervisor or manager, for instance, increases the psychological difficulties of those under him, and



this automatically increases his own difficulties. With a vicious circle of this sort the only remedy is to attack at all points. Where the psycho-therapist sees deeply-rooted personal difficulties as the main feature of the situation, other psychologists will stress the need for reorganizing the firm's employment policy, for improving its selection and training of supervisors, for discovering the minor grievances (real and imaginary) on which the workers focus their more diffuse dissatisfactions. Both approaches are right, and both are necessary if the vicious circle is to be broken.

Much that is true of working life applies equally to leisure, where up to the present still less has been done along psychological lines. Tremendous scope exists for increasing the true satisfactions gained from leisure pursuits among people of all social grades. It is unfortunate that the psychological studies that have been made of leisure—and the same is true of work—have largely been limited to the lower ranks of workers. Equally serious problems and equal scope for improvement exist in the upper economic levels. But this is a point that must be returned to.

The interaction of the defects of present-day industrial life with more profound psychological difficulties in the individual sometimes gives rise to disagreement between social reformers and psychologists. The political and economic reformer does sometimes suppose that the changes he wishes to make will of themselves put right the underlying psychological distresses. The claim is sometimes made that the economic conditions of Soviet Russia have eliminated or greatly reduced



anxiety states. *Prima facie* the claim is wildly improbable. And the evidence brought to substantiate it has not yet been of the quality required by scientific standards. In a sceptical review of one enthusiastic book on the subject John Rickman writes:

"The reviewer had some experience in Russia as a physician before, during, and after the Revolution and knows how hard it is to get reliable data. He was asked about a decade ago [i.e. about 1924] by a very prominent Commissar to inspect the psychiatric clinics of the U.S.S.R. and report. Knowing of certain difficulties one question was put to the Commissar: 'Would my report reach Headquarters or would the political department censor it first?' With admirable candour the reply was that it would be censored by the political department first; so the invitation was declined. When facts are thought to have a strategic value it is hard for science to make headway."

What is conceivable is that, if economic conditions were greatly improved, neurotic troubles would less often express themselves in occupational discontents and disabilities, and a small proportion might never reach an acute form. But there would be no lack of other outlets for the greater proportion.

The facts have been put from the analytic standpoint by R. Money-Kyrle in discussing the possibility that environmental improvements might directly reduce the likelihood of war:

"A change in the social, moral, or economic system that decreased frustration should decrease aggressiveness. But Dr. Glover refuses to commit himself without some years of preliminary research. The problem of



the interaction between real and fictitious frustrating objects is involved. Most of the real frustrating objects that appear to evoke aggression do so mainly because they are unconsciously identified with fictitious ones. Therefore, in so far as environmental improvements left these latter unaffected the decrease in aggression would probably be small."

And though the strict Freudian view may not be accepted, a more general psychological survey of the problem brings us to a broadly similar conclusion. Social and economic changes can do much. But in order to ease the "strains of peace" at all thoroughly some way must be found of handling the more deeply submerged confusions of feeling and attitude.

Here we must break off to follow another line of argument which leads to the same conclusion. So far I have discussed means of strengthening our opposition to war and our attachment to peace. The most that could be achieved along these lines would be the acceptance of a supra-national authority which would tame the dominative principle and keep it under some degree of control. This would not give a radical peace organized on a different principle from the dominative society. For an uncompromising eradication of war and quasi-war we have to aim at withdrawing the present universal sanction from the idea that domination and submission—or a mixture of the two in compromise—provide the only social pattern for the handling of differences.

How can this aim be achieved? The first recommendation must be an unpalatable one: that we should each as far as possible relinquish our own dominative



attitudes. This conflicts with our long-established preference for improving others by dominative means:

"The first thing to do is to form the committees:

"The consultative councils, the standing committees, select committees and sub-committees."

Moreover, our domination is largely beyond our conscious control and we cannot hope to carry out the recommendation at all thoroughly. It is like being advised: "Don't be neurotic!" The tendency cannot be dealt with by domination directed against ourselves, a fact which is bound to chagrin the dominative.<sup>1</sup> A great deal, none the less, is within our conscious control. Much can be done in the way of mapping our jealousies and observing where we give and where we expect deference; and where we ought to give, and where we can reasonably claim, respect. The difficulties do not exempt anyone from trying to be less dominative (or less submissive, according to his temperamental reaction to the pattern of domination and submission). To break the vicious circle of domination and submission at one point is probably as important as anything in the power of the individual person. The greater his social influence, the more effect his achievement of integrative behaviour is likely to have.

But there is also ample scope for the more congenial activity of influencing others and altering institutions.

<sup>1</sup> This again is, I believe, one of the intuitions that Graham Howe expresses in *War Dance*, and though his idiom is not to my taste it may be the form in which some people can best assimilate the idea.



Any institutional change that tends to increase economic security, to equalize opportunity, to gain respect for abilities and not for mere dexterity in the practices of domination and deference, will contribute to psychological security. Such changes increase the possibility of integrative behaviour. They make the gradients of deference less steep and correspondingly increase the possibility of genuine mutual respect.

At this point, however, a very common misunderstanding may have arisen. Whenever economic and social reforms are mentioned it is assumed that they are primarily intended to make things better for the underdog. It is the natural assumption of people who are both patronizing and guilty—the natural assumption of a dominative society which has glimmerings of social maturity. In connection with reforms aimed at eradicating war the assumption is particularly inept, since it is certainly not the underdog who has most say in deciding on war. The most important reforms—for the present purpose—are not those which aim at lifting the lowest classes to the economic, moral, and hygienic level of the stratum above them, but those which could apply to the life of people of all classes. Insecurity and jealous, dominative safeguarding of one's status are found high up the scale of earned income. And many whose unearned economic security is beyond all question have equally intense anxieties over their status in other directions. An integrative texture of society cannot be achieved unless some way is found of relieving all classes of their insecurities, of freeing them from the anxious conviction that happiness depends on keeping



a sufficient number of people below them on the gradient of deference.

The prevailing organization by deference restricts those higher up the gradient almost as much in some ways (though of course not nearly so much in others) as it does those lower down. Choice of employment, for example, is seriously restricted for the children of the well-to-do. One of the very important functions of scientific vocational guidance is to persuade parents of good social standing to allow their child to take up the only sort of work he is suited to when its deference-value happens to be low. But many parents are far too insecure to accept advice of that sort. Deference matters too much, and the idea that their son might lead a better life as a garage proprietor than as a solicitor is inconceivable to them. (Most parents, of course, never expose themselves to a scientific appraisal of their child's capacities.) Similarly a large number of lower-middle-class girls are dedicated from infancy to shorthand and typing and completely debarred from the factory work at which they might not only be happier but actually earn more. Indeed, one of the small compensations of war is that it loosens restrictions on the employment of the more prosperous. Those of their children who are not particularly able can for the first time take up simple employment within their capacity and not lose status by doing so.

With regard to leisure, too, we may certainly doubt whether all that is needed are the familiar efforts of the culturally mediocre to impose their taste on those of lower income. In certain directions higher social



grades could learn from lower. Gusto in spending, for instance, and the vivid interpretation of money in terms of the direct satisfactions it can bring are fairly usual among the very poor but almost beyond the capacity of the middle-classes.

If this is true of work and leisure it applies still more clearly to the problems of intimate social life arising out of the relations between the sexes, between husbands and wives, between them and each other's families, between parents and children, between the children themselves within the home. The customs, conventions, and laws governing these relationships are capable of immense improvement, and the resultant easing of strains would be found at every economic level. Increased satisfactions derived from work and leisure—whether from the activities themselves or from their social setting—will not amount to very much unless they are accompanied by improvements in intimate social life as well. But here, more evidently than anywhere else, we soon reach the limits of what can be done by institutional changes and by good advice based on a simple conscious inspection of the problems. We are back at the point to which we were brought even by the less thorough-going attempts to avert war. Some attention must be given to factors that are outside ordinary conscious control.

It is the psychological structure of the family that does the most intimate and the least easily remedied damage to the individual. The diverse troubles that may arise from misfortunes in the early family situation are of course outside the scope of this book. But certain



general features of family organization as we know it are highly relevant to the basic problem of insecurity and domination. It is on these features of family life that the work of Ian Suttie [1935] throws so much light.

One of his main themes is the tremendous importance of the mother's role and the difficulties which our present social order places in the way of her fulfilling it successfully. Without needing to consider the question from the standpoint of psychotherapy we can certainly agree, on general grounds, that the orthodox position of married women creates many psychological difficulties. The status of their work is far below that of their husband's occupation in the outside world. Housework and cooking, hard and wearisome as they may often be, are regarded as a routine which the woman more or less takes in her stride, and are no more to be remarked than the fact that she washes and dresses herself. Her work gives her practically none of the social contacts which are found in almost all men's work; and yet when she breaks off for gossip this is regarded (often by the woman herself) as a feminine weakness. Moreover it is implied that she is highly favoured by having this type of existence made possible for her: the man keeps her and shields her from the outer world. Himself, he comes home creditably tired, to be fed and to claim implicit admiration for enduring the burden and heat of the day. Her humble job is supposed to be a privilege.

Now there is naturally much to be said on the other side, and many women would shrink from any great



change in this social order. An aggressively "feminist" viewpoint is likely to be just as unsatisfactory as the situation against which it protests. Yet, as Suttie argues, a society which makes women the protégées of men, rather than their companions, produces serious psychological difficulties. In particular it means that enormous stress is placed on the woman's task of rearing her children, in which even the most patriarchal society must give her pre-eminence. Hence she tends to look to her children as the full meaning and justification of life, finding unduly intense satisfactions in the mutual emotional dependence between them and herself.

The result is seen in the outlook of the infant on the social and material world. In the first place the father, together with the masculine world which he represents, will be for the infant "what the mother's reactions make him out to be." It follows that "if he dominates her and she accepts his dominance, *might* will certainly seem to the infant not only *right* but virtue, the true way of winning love." One might add that if *she* dominates *him*, as she often does without openly rejecting her conventional role, the infant will find it even more difficult to get true bearings in relationships involving love, power and deference.

Apart from this direct effect, says Suttie, the woman's over-sharp emotional focussing on the children will have bad indirect effects through disturbing the process by which the child is weaned from complete dependence on the mother and finds interest and gratification elsewhere. Ideally, "the child's resources



in companionship and play-interest increase *pari passu* with the separation from the mother and the loss of the direct love-caressing-interest in her . . . the child will easily renounce more primitive enjoyments and security *if offered a more social but equally secure substitute.*" But the ideal is not often realized. In a society of mothers who are emotionally over-dependent on their children—or who resist the tendency by going to the other extreme—this process of psychological weaning presents severe difficulties.

The mother may, for instance, carry it out reluctantly, being too solicitously tender, too insistently companionable when the child could be welcoming new companions. At the other extreme, having accepted too fully the ideals of a "tough" society and repressed her own submerged longings, she will enforce the psychological separation too abruptly and with some degree of harsh embarrassment. The difficulties thus created for the child are not transient troubles which are "got over" as he grows up. The psychological weaning gives him his first bearings for finding his way about the world—or the blue-print from which he builds himself into the social structure.

In meeting difficulties in later life, for example, he may never be completely without hope of returning to infantile dependence; his behaviour will be in some measure regressive. Or the early sense of rejection may lead to a conviction of being unworthy and inferior, of having deserved the rejection. These are submissive reactions to the situation. More aggressively the child may react by seeking and believing in power with



which to compel the love and admiring interest that he feels himself deprived of. Still more commonly he will embrace—and this is Suttie's most original contribution—the “taboo on tenderness”; he will accept the view that the world can never be a tolerable place until one has learnt to be “tough.” He (or she), in Suttie's words,

“holds up ‘toughness,’ aggressiveness, hardness, etc., as prime virtues. . . . Obviously this state of mind is a *reaction* against the sentiments related to the mother and the nursery, from which (mentally) these children have just emerged, in all probability unwillingly. The suggestion arises that the whole of this character formation is a revenge upon and a repudiation of the ‘weaning’ mother, on the defensive principle of ‘sour grapes.’ ”

These are some of the manifold ways in which bad psychological weaning helps to people the dominative society with its characteristic types: the insecure, self-depreciating personalities who feel ill-equipped to face the world and—given an impressive enough leader—welcome opportunities to become subordinates and do as they're told; the immature personalities who seek to compel attention and deference to their power and, full of grudges against the existing order, seek to destroy it and substitute one which they feel will give them what they crave; the harsh and bitter critics who can only belittle or deride the world that rejected them; the dominant possessors of power who keep a vicelike hold on the system which has them equally in *its* vice. These are extreme types, perhaps, but



perfectly in keeping with our society and common enough to shape its characteristic structure.

These more or less "normal" or acceptable reactions to faulty psychological weaning give place to neurosis and delinquency among an unlucky minority of children and adults. That topic is beyond the scope of this book, though relevant enough to the theme. But the following report gives a glimpse in the smallest possible compass of dominative "normality" in contact with less "normal" reactions to the problems with which our society confronts its members from infancy onwards:

"Salford magistrates yesterday ordered six strokes of the birch to be given to a nine-year-old boy who, it was alleged, in a fit of jealousy stabbed a boy with a knife.

" 'It is only by good luck that you are not a murderer,' said the chairman to the boy who caused a wound half an inch long near the left shoulder.

"Just before the sentence was passed, the boy's mother collapsed in court, and after the sentence his father, who was in tears, protested against the decision and said he would appeal against it." (*News Chronicle*, January 17, 1941.)

To trace out the full implications in social structure and relationships of this tiny incident would go far towards revealing the psychological nature of violence in society.

Placing so much emphasis on psychological weaning must not be taken to imply the belief that here we have the key to the whole of social life and its prob-



lems. Other features of family life and the social order are obviously of great importance. Yet this is a point in our upbringing which has received disproportionately little attention in comparison with its possible significance, and it is not likely to be over-emphasized for a long while yet. The early family situation must be the means by which any society perpetuates its typical patterns, the means by which it forms a closed circuit and precludes criticism of its basic assumptions. Suttie's work emphasizes that the crucial point in that situation is the achievement by mother and child of emotional independence of each other. Further—and deviating still more from the usual psycho-analytic view—he sees that one of the main obstacles to successful psychological weaning in our society is the cultural, man-made fact of women's social position in relation to men. The broad sociological fact and the intimate psychological events perpetually reinforce each other.

We must beware, however, of supposing that the remedy lies simply in sociological changes. To take a man and woman already brought up in the prevailing modes and try to equalize their social status might only add a few more knots to the tangle, both for them and their children. "After all," the reader protests, "we tried all this emancipated woman and emancipated child-rearing stuff in the nineteen-twenties. And it didn't get us anywhere." The efforts of the nineteen-twenties were hampered by various misunderstandings. One (the result of Freudian influence) was that sex was thought to be of almost exclusive importance—sex regarded as a physical appetite. Other features of



intimate social life are of equal importance. Again, it was too often felt as a matter of reproach that one suffered from repressions and unconscious confusions of attitude. It was imagined that one's own conscious effort (of "emancipation" or what not) could put matters right. Worse still, it was supposed that an enlightened outlook and a good text-book would enable any intelligent parents to bring up their children in a way that avoided neurotic troubles.

To correct these misunderstandings two facts must constantly be insisted on. The first is the enormous difficulty of altering one's own psycho-pathological tendencies without help. The second is the almost equal difficulty of combining a clinical and a social relationship to the same person, adult or child. That is, it is exceedingly difficult to realize clinically what is happening to children whom you are also responsible for bringing up. It is not unknown for the children of psycho-therapists to be neurotic, and that fact should not surprise us. It must be insisted on that the intimate difficulties which contribute so much to "the strains of peace" need actual treatment by specialized techniques, and not just good intentions combined with common sense. "We managed without all this psycho-therapy in the past," is the impulsive rejoinder—until we remember that the warring past is what we hope to break with.

Apart from the need for further research (which all psychologists would agree in regarding as vital), it is the need for specialized treatment upon which the analysts chiefly insist. Especially—and reasonably—



they stress the value of child analysis. The difficulties of infancy cannot be entirely avoided, but they can be prevented from generating difficulties in adult life; by analysis in early childhood they can be got at arm's length and put into a proper perspective. "If every child were psycho-analysed as a normal part of its education, we should almost certainly enjoy an incomparably more comfortable world" (Money-Kyrle). And at all events in the first generation of such a scheme the parents too would need analysis. The cost, argue the analysts, would be negligible compared with the cost of armaments.

Now such a proposal usually arouses deep suspicion and antagonism in the ordinary member of the public. The present attitude towards analysis and psychotherapy in general is an exaggerated form of what people felt towards dentistry about a century ago. Jane Austen expressed it in a letter to her sister in 1813:

"The poor Girls and their Teeth!—I have not mentioned them yet, but we were a whole hour at Spence's, and Lizzy's were filed and lamented over again and poor Marianne had two taken out after all . . . Fanny's teeth were cleaned too—and pretty as they are, Spence found something to do to them, putting in gold and talking gravely—and making a considerable point of seeing her again before winter;—he had before urged the expediency of L[izzy] and M[arianne]'s being brought to Town in the course of a couple of Months to be further examined, and continued to press for their all coming to him.—My B[rother] would not absolutely promise.—The little girls teeth I can suppose



in a critical state, but I think he must be a Lover of Teeth and Money and Mischeif to parade about Fannys.—I would not have had him look at mine for a shilling a tooth and double it.”

We know now that this mistaken attitude not only prevented people at that time (and for long after) from getting such benefit as their contemporary dentists could give them, but also greatly delayed the improvement of dental techniques. Much the same is probably true of analysis and psycho-therapy to-day. Just as social reform has advanced beyond the stage of charitable aid for the completely crushed, so the social use of psycho-therapy needs to advance to conceptions of ensuring mental health rather than patching up the worst psychological breakdowns. To revert to the analogy of dentistry, we are in much the same stage, in the use we make of psycho-therapy, as were those who went to the dentist only when they got intolerable toothache. The imperfections in the practitioners' training and techniques are no good reason for not making all possible use of them. Admittedly there are still profound disagreements between the various schools of psycho-therapy over the technique of treatment. Even within the one school of Freudian analysis there are fundamental divergences of doctrine and practice in the psycho-analysis of children.<sup>1</sup> But so long as a technique is predominantly one of mental exploration rather than suggestion it is likely to be of value. At present, as with every profession in its early stages, thoroughly unsatisfactory practitioners are to be met

<sup>1</sup> Between Melanie Klein and Anna Freud.



with in all camps; but so are thoroughly good ones. We have to take the risk, just as earlier generations had with dentists.

The conclusion must be, then, that simultaneous changes along many different lines will be needed before people can find a way of relinquishing war. Group life must become more intelligible. Changes in the political machinery through which groups interact need to consolidate, and also to foster, advances in social life within groups. These advances must affect not only the broad features of the social pattern but also its more intimate texture, including threads which are at present beyond the range of conscious inspection. Through these parallel advances there is some hope of creating societies and individuals capable of meeting each other integratively and of achieving what they want in their peace-time lives. Each approach to the problem will appeal to different minds, and human society is still plastic enough to produce the variety of minds that the task demands.



## CHAPTER XV

# In Short

It may be useful to summarize the argument of this book. A brief statement is likely to sound dogmatic, but it is meant only as a recapitulation of themes that have been formulated more precisely and argued more carefully in previous chapters.

War has been treated here as a social regression. Looked at within the limits of any one nation it may perhaps represent a peak of communal effort and achievement. But seen in a wider context the belligerents are social units in a civilization which proclaims peaceful co-operation as its norm. The fact of their being at war is a dereliction from ideals to which both sides subscribe—at least verbally—up to the very moment of committing themselves to war.

War is regressive in the same sense as it is regressive for two men to come to blows because one has usurped the other's position in a theatre queue. Physically and mentally each may be braced by the fight, but as social beings they have fallen below the developed standards which each believed in. We need not for a moment doubt that one is more to blame than the other. In civil life the apportionment of blame can be



carried out by legal machinery or overwhelming public opinion, and therefore our first effort is merely to stop the fight and restore order. But if we were living in a gold-rush community, without effective police, our first concern would be to ensure that the right man won.

So too in international violence. War, once broken out, is perforce accepted as the means whereby the dispute will be "settled." To see it within the broad context of civilization as regressive no more exempts us from taking part than a detached, scientific view of crime should make us passive in face of burglary (cf. p. 216). No scientific view of war can undermine our conviction of being morally justified when we fight against wrongful aggression. Here again there is an analogy in crime. A detached analysis may convince us that our established institutions, and to that extent we ourselves, are responsible for producing criminals. But if we or our law-abiding neighbours are in danger of robbery with violence we need not doubt our moral right to defend ourselves or them. So too in any actual war there are rights and wrongs of the moment, and degrees of responsibility and blame, and it must be our convictions on these points that guide our immediate actions. Yet the broader context remains, and within that frame of reference the state of war is a regression.

These periods of regression mean that ours is a warring civilization; this in spite of our wish to consider it peaceful and our determination to regard wars as unnatural in our culture merely because they are intermittent. Such a statement exasperates those who



want to think of war as a calamity coming from without, like earthquake and storm. But we cannot ignore the fact that other cultures, building on the same human material and handling the same basic problems of human relationship, have managed with vastly less warfare. In other words, warfare and fighting are in large measure cultural products. This seems to be the least we can conclude from the anthropological evidence that Perry in particular has stressed, even though we reject his theory in its literal form.

On the other hand, a cultural institution like war is not imposed suddenly on grown-up people whose earlier life has left them unprepared for it. If it did not strike us as a natural outcome of human nature (our socialized human nature) it would not be one of our social institutions. By recognizing this fact Perry reduces the gap between his theory and that of the Freudians. The latter put their emphasis on the preparedness of the individual human being for war. They try to show the pressure of individual needs which finds release in war, pogroms, heresy-hunting, and social violence of all kinds. We may doubt whether their view applies to anything except human nature which has been socially developed in a certain arbitrary way, but within those limits it gains support from much clinical observation and from the insight into everyday behaviour which the psycho-analytic attitude has encouraged. It means that the emotions leading to war—both the hatreds and the fears—are partly “neurotic,” in a certain definite sense: namely, that the situation has a hidden or repressed significance for



us, beyond the range of our insight, and that our emotions are largely a response to this hidden significance.

The important question is *how large* a part the repressed factors play. It seems likely that all experiences and actions are assimilated to unconscious patterns as well as to conscious. The question is always the relative importance of the conscious and the unconscious; the greater the influence of repressed impulses in determining behaviour the more "neurotic" it is. If the Freudians regard war as *in the main* "neurotic," in this sense, they are probably over-simplifying the picture. Yet, I believe, the neurotic aspect of war is prominent enough to be of great practical importance. And in this connection we should consider not only unconscious aggressiveness (though that may be basic), but also unconscious anxieties, jealousies, and protests against various features of life in peace-time. It may be that we do not "unconsciously want war" (or not to any great extent), but that we are unconsciously in a state of intense protest against the peace-time existence we know, and therefore the less reluctant to sacrifice it.

The psycho-analytic approach no doubt throws some light on one puzzling feature of modern wars. This is the fact that in all the belligerent countries the greater part of the population is repelled by the idea of war and often opposes it until the last moment, and yet the wars come and the populations acquiesce. When an individual strongly denounces litigation and yet punctuates his life with law-suits, we rightly suspect



the operation of motives beyond his insight. The analysts would have us think of our war-denouncing, war-making nations in the same way. But with groups as large as nations other possible explanations have to be taken into account. Some of these have been discussed in the chapters on public opinion and on propaganda and rationalization. If an influential section of a nation decides that war is necessary, the reluctance of numerically large sections of the nation can—within wide limits—be overcome. This possibility arises in part from the huge size of States and the complexity of their politics. In such States it is extremely difficult for any one person, and especially for the great host of us politically inexperienced, to see very far into the implications of a given political act. The political groups in which we are organized have grown, in size and complexity, beyond the limits of insight of their members; to some extent we are ant-like.

These facts of social life in colossal groups mean that acquiescing in war is psychologically very different from resorting to personal assault or joining in a free fight. Yet in the last analysis it seems likely that, even if we and our enemies knew fully what our nations were fighting for, we should still go to war. There would be real differences and disputes between us; and our civilization has a long-established faith in the social techniques of domination and submission as the chief means of handling disagreements. Many people, indeed, can conceive of no other way. Either one side must yield and the other prevail, or else there must be a compromise: and a compromise means that each



side reluctantly submits at some points in order to get its own way at others. A different social technique for handling differences is in use, but it is rudimentary. The techniques of domination and submission are what our civilization has so far chiefly developed, and this appears in our respect for the forceful and convincing statement of a case, for self-confidence, for knowing one's own mind, for sticking up for one's own rights, for giving way with good grace, for biding one's time, and for all the similar forms of dexterity in dominative and submissive social intercourse. From this point of view power diplomacy and war develop naturally out of the techniques of civil life.

The restriction of physical violence in civil life does of course constitute a great advance as compared with the intercourse of nations. The concentration of power in the hands of the most tyrannous of rulers is doubtless preferable to haphazard brigandage, and more democratic forms of government represent a still greater advance towards peace. But it has been the argument of this book that the absence of physical combat is not enough to give us a psychologically different form of social intercourse called "peace." What the politicians and jurists are content to call peace might be better described as "aim-inhibited war." In the social conflicts of peace-time, between individuals or groups within the nation, we have learnt to check ourselves before we get far along the road to war. But we are not on a different road.

That a totally different technique of handling differences is available has been made clear by the work of



H. H. Anderson, who has identified it under the term "social integration." Essentially it means that two people who find themselves differing take the opportunity to reconsider completely their original aim or opinion. They are plastic enough to do it. They are also secure enough psychologically to do it; secure enough to accept the paradox that they will still have their identity in spite of becoming different from what they were. There is nothing new about integrative social behaviour. Most of us are continually engaged in it over small matters. But it remains rudimentary, an undeveloped social technique. Its extension to important matters in the relationships of individuals and groups would change social life out of all recognition. It would bring a condition of social intercourse different enough from war to be called peace.

The very idea of changing our social life "out of all recognition" is alarming; our impulse is to take a firmer clutch on what we already have. What we already have includes war, of course, but better that than the terrors of something profoundly different from what we know. It is a similar reaction of insecurity to any invitation to change, even in small matters, that stands in the way of integrative behaviour. As Lasswell [1935] has suggested, there is an unbroken line connecting personal insecurity with the outbreak of war between nations.

The possibility of relinquishing or greatly reducing dominative behaviour depends on the attainment of greater psychological security in our social dealings. Changes in the social environment of the adult may do



a great deal. By themselves, however, they cannot be effective if unconscious sources of anxiety and insecurity which have been developed in infancy are left in full activity. To achieve security in adult social life we must eradicate the effects of insecurity in family life; for social relationships within the family provide the paradigm for every adult social relationship, including war.



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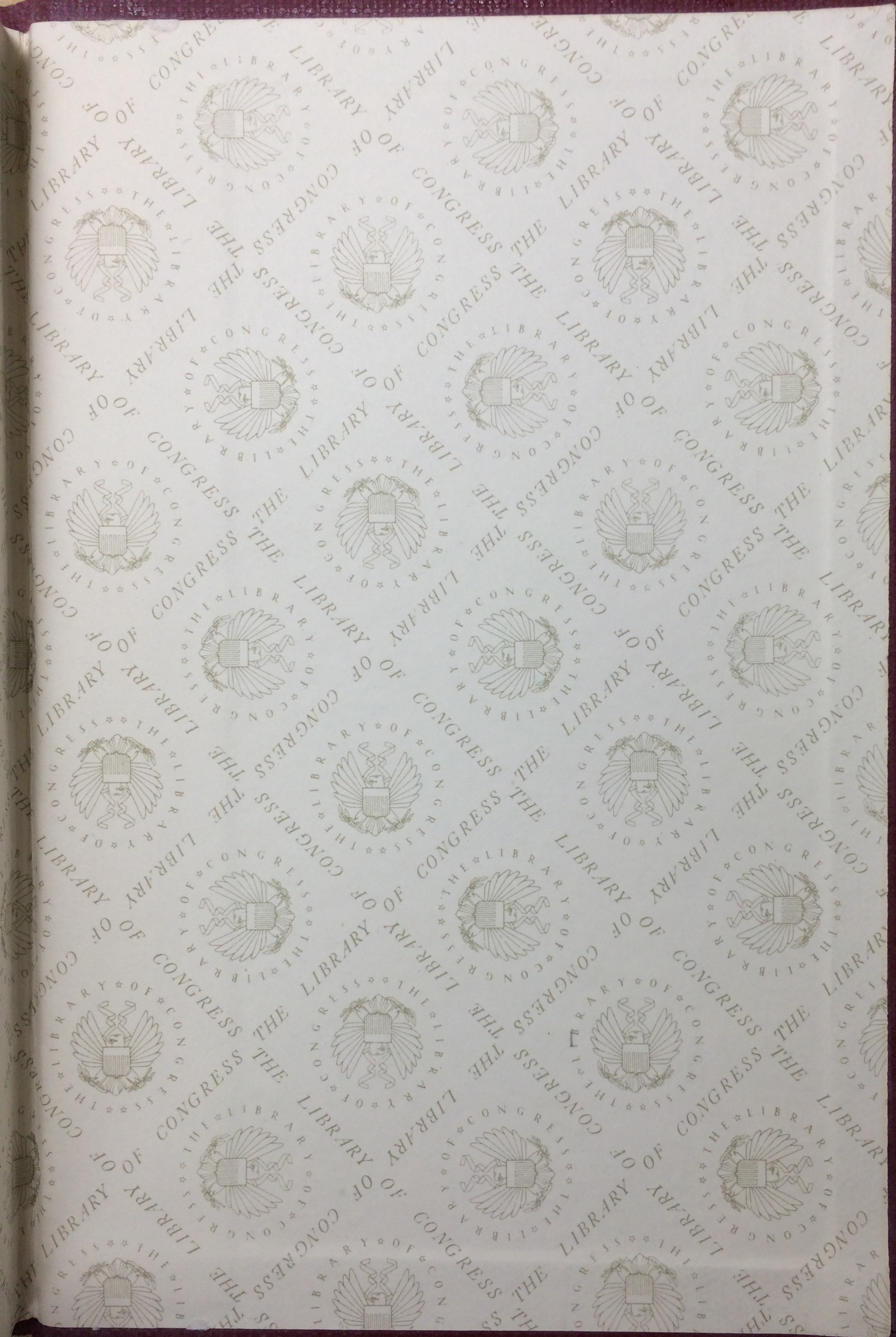
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